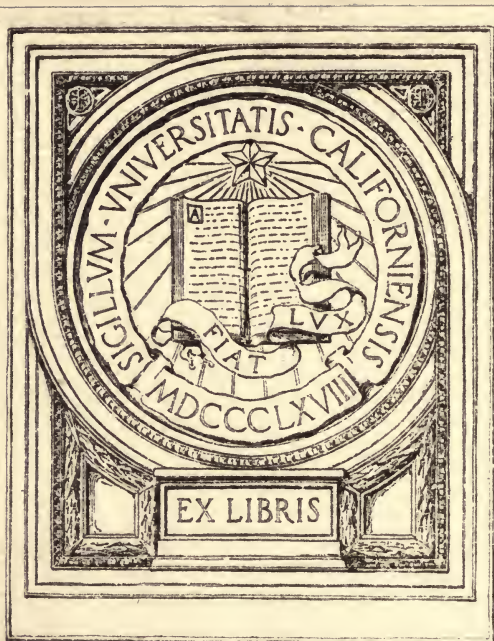


SADDLES AND LARIATS

by

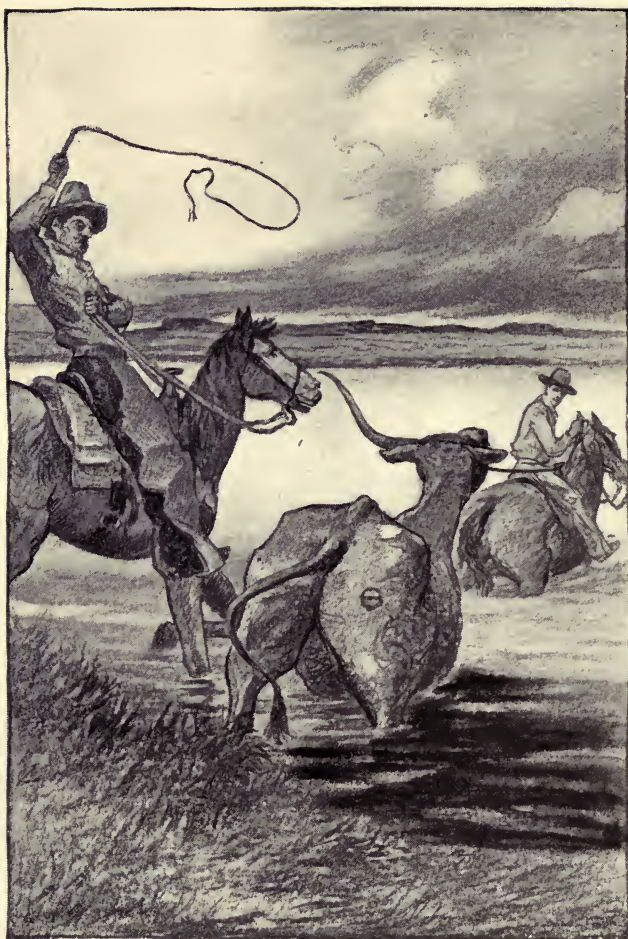
LEWIS B. MILLER





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SADDLES AND LARIATS



THEN THE STEER TOOK THE WATER AND FOLLOWED JESS.

Saddles and Lariats

THE LARGELY TRUE STORY OF THE BAR-CIRCLE
OUTFIT, AND OF THEIR ATTEMPT TO TAKE A
BIG DROVE OF LONGHORNS FROM TEXAS
TO CALIFORNIA, IN THE DAYS WHEN
THE GOLD FEVER RAGED

By
LEWIS B. MILLER

AUTHOR OF

"The White River Raft," "A Crooked Trail," "The Barnaby
Claim," "When the Wemmikaw Levee Broke," "Big
Smoke Mountain," "The Branded Oak," "Lep and
Coaly," "The Cruise of the Blunderbuss," etc.



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U. C.
ACADEMY OF
PACIFIC COAST
HISTORY

TO MY FATHER,
HENRY MILLER,
OF
MILLERVILLE, TEXAS,
WHO KNOWS, FAR BETTER THAN
I, THE TRUE STORY OF THE
BAR-CIRCLE OUTFIT

AUTHOR'S NOTE

FOR three hundred years the Anglo-American, strong son of the Anglo-Saxon, has been engaged in conquering his three thousand miles of wilderness. But at last his giant's task is ended. No more remains any region between the two oceans that deserves the name of wilderness. And with that conquest has ended the pioneer life — such a life as the world never saw before. And certainly the world shall not look upon its like again. Already the explorer, the Indian trader, the hunter and trapper, the cowboy, the settler with an axe in one hand and a rifle in the other, have followed the war-painted savage into the dimming, shadowy past.

While the life that is is better, it can never be so picturesque as was the rude, homely life of the frontiersman. And the farther we travel from that simple life, both in time and ways of living, the more we shall love to read of it and talk of it, and the more, it may be, we shall regret that it has gone from us forever.

Of all the wild life in America, none was so striking as that to be seen along the great wilderness trails — the emigrant trails and the cattle trails. And in picturesqueness nothing could surpass those vast droves of horned steers, with their overhanging dust-clouds, their shouting, galloping cowboy drivers, and their attending wagon-trains, which, now nearly two generations ago, tramped the thousands of miles from Texas, the land of cattle, to California, the land of gold.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is the story of one such caravan, or "outfit," that I have tried to tell in the pages that follow.

While these experiences were first set down from the lips of one who had had an active part in them all; and while whole chapters are almost wholly true, and the people named are real people, and several have their real names, the narrative is not strictly true as written. Gladly would I have related the true story of the Bar-Circle Outfit if that had been possible. But countless details, necessary to the interest of the story, could, after half a century, be supplied only by the imagination. And since fiction must be introduced, it seemed better to make other changes. Where things so unpleasant happened that one could wish they had not happened, I have told them differently. And when nothing of interest occurred, I have filled in, partly with fiction, and partly with true incidents borrowed from other sources. The invented part I have tried to make so much like the real life that even one who knew that life cannot tell where fact ends and fiction begins.

In short, I have endeavored to give the narrative the value of a history and the interest of a story.

Whether I have succeeded or not, the reader will judge for himself. But it seems to me well worth while, while the few who can tell of that far-past, forever-past life are still with us, to make some record of their experiences.

L. B. M.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.

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HE COULD DISCOVER NO SIGNS OF A HUMAN HABITATION.

SADDLES AND LARIATS

CHAPTER I

ON GUARD FOR REDSKINS

JUST at sunset one day in April, 1854, a horseman might have been seen riding westward across a broad, green, tree-dotted, grove-spotted prairie in central Texas. He had traveled far without sight of a settler's cabin; and as the pony jogged along the dim road, nipping at the grass every now and then, the rider shaded his eyes with his hand and gazed ahead, half longingly. A dark line crossed his course a mile away. It was timber — the timber skirting the Brazos River. But he could discover no signs of a human habitation.

As he sat in the saddle, the traveler appeared an inch or two less than six feet tall. He had brown hair and a smooth, boyish-looking face; for his age had barely entered the twenties. His most noticeable feature was a shapely but rather prominent nose, of the type which takes its name from the race that conquered and so long ruled the earth — the Romans. In build he was rather slender and wiry, so much so that the most careful observer would scarcely have suspected the amount of energy and endurance that lurked in the muscular, toil-hardened frame of this farmer's boy.

The day had been warm, and he was still in his shirt-sleeves, his coat being tied behind the saddle, on top of a blanket and a pair of leather saddle-bags. Though traveling through a wild country, he carried no gun; but the polished handle of a six-shooter protruded from a leather holster hanging at his belt. A Spanish gourd, large at each end and small in the middle, was fastened to his saddle-horn for carrying water.

Soon after the sun had dropped down behind the forest, the chill in the air drove him to seek the warmth of his homespun coat. And believing that he would have to spend the night by a lonely camp-fire, he began to feel in the saddle-bags for some scraps of dried beef left over from dinner.

But presently the cheerful barking of dogs greeted his ear. Much relieved, he urged his pony to a faster gait.

Not far in the woods he came upon a little group of log-cabins, daubed some with lime and some with yellow mud; and beyond the cabins he saw a farm, thickly covered with girdled, deadened trees. A young woman stood in the door of the largest cabin, and some children, both white and black, were playing in the yard. Two mounted men, a white man and a negro, were just pushing a little drove of horses into a rail-pen near the cabins.

Several dogs surrounded the traveler, barking at him clamorously, till the young woman scolded them away. He waited till the two men had penned the

horses and put up the bars; then he said to the white man:

"I'm traveling. What's the chance to get to stay all night?"

"Purty good, I guess," answered the settler, a tall, pleasant-appearing man of middle age. "But you may have to help fight."

"Fight! Fight what?"

"Redskins. The country's alive with 'em. That's why we've got our horses penned. Hadn't you heard about 'em?"

"No." The young traveler glanced around apprehensively. "They didn't mention Indians back at the last settlement." This was his first experience of the perils of frontier life, and the thought that his scalp had been in danger caused a strange, creepy feeling to run over him.

"The red varmints hadn't got that fur east, I guess. But they're as thick as sumac berries along the river here. Well, get down and unsaddle. What's your name, and where you from?"

"Holloway — Jess Holloway; and I'm originally from Tennessee — Lawrence county."

The settler held out his hand. "Glad to see you, young man! I'm from old Tennessee myself, a little further west, on the Kentucky line. I've been away from there fifteen years, though. Adams is my name."

They shook hands heartily. While unfastening his saddle-girths the young man explained:

"I've been away from home three years. Spent

one year on a big plantation in Mississippi, and two years farming and flatboating in eastern Texas. Now I'm on my way west to look at the country."

"Well, there's lots of it out here to look at," remarked Adams. "Wait a minute, and we'll take your horse to water." He went to the house, and soon returned with a double-barrel shot-gun on his shoulder.

The two followed a path which led to a little stream a quarter of a mile down in the woods. On returning, they staked the horse on a patch of crab-grass inside the field, and the settler called to a negro boy to bring a few bundles of oats. Then Adams and Holloway went to the house.

It was a good-sized room, very neatly kept, that the young traveler found himself in. The night had grown chilly, and the negro man was kindling a fire in the wide fireplace. A candle was already burning on the mantel. The young woman that Jess had noticed was in the room, at the back side, busy at a spinning-wheel. The floor was made of puncheons—hewn slabs. Three guns rested on deer-horns against the upper walls.

"Here, here, Tim, do you want to run us all out of the house?" the settler broke off his conversation with Jess to exclaim, laughingly.

After starting the fire the negro had gone out and brought in a big armful of dry wood, and was about to pile it on.

"No, suh! Cose not, Mas' Tom. Feelin' kin' o' chilly myse'f—I is."

He put down the wood by the chimney-jamb and went out. Jess noticed that he was dressed in buckskin from head to foot, and wore a coonskin cap.

"Tim loves heat," the settler remarked. "The hotter he gets the happier he feels. Guess that's because all his forefathers lived in a hot country. He's a good fellow, but he's better at everything else than at farm-work. He's especially fond of the woods. Why, he's the best rifle-shot in this part of the country. I'm something of a hunter myself, but he can kill three deer to my one. He keeps us supplied with meat, and he could clothe us all, I believe, if we cared to wear buckskin. Most of his people are rather cowardly, but Tim's as brave as they make 'em. He's entirely too brave — reckless, in fact. The Comanches will get 'im some of these days."

There had been no introduction, but the young woman sometimes joined in the conversation, without stopping her spinning-wheel. Jess learned that she was the settler's niece, and her name was Sally Adams.

A little negro girl soon came to announce that supper was ready, and they all went out to another cabin. Here Jess found Adams's wife and children. A black woman, the cook, waited on the table. The dishes Jess was fondest of were baked venison and honey, both of which, he was informed, had been brought in from the woods by Tim, the black man.

Supper over, the white people returned to the cabin they had left. Mrs. Adams came also, but soon went out to put her children to bed. Sally, the niece, went

with her, but later came back and started her wheel again. And she made it sing.

In the course of the conversation it came out that Adams and Tim had both been up most of two nights, and they had been too busy to sleep in the daytime. So Jess said:

"I'll relieve you to-night. Both of you can go to bed. I'll stand guard."

"Any danger that you'll drop off to sleep?" asked the settler.

"None whatever," the young man assured him.

"All right. Guess we'll let you try it awhile. Whenever you get sleepy, wake one of us. Tim will make his bed here by the fire, and I'll be in the next room. And you'd better wake him or me if anything suspicious occurs. The dogs will let you know if there's anybody around. But we've lost so much sleep we may not hear 'em. Better take that shot-gun when you go out. Big load of buckshot in each barrel."

He disappeared through the partition-door. Jess sat gazing into the fire, and sometimes casting admiring side-glances at Sally Adams as she walked back and forth at her wheel, deftly holding the thread with one hand and making the wheel hum and the spindle sing with the other. Tim soon came in, carrying a buffalo-rug and some blankets. Throwing the rug on the floor, he lay down on it, with his head nearest the fire, pulled the blankets over him, and was soon breathing heavily.

"I tell Tim he'll bake his brains if he doesn't quit



DEFTLY HOLDING THE THREAD WITH ONE HAND.

sleeping with his head to the fire," laughed the girl, letting her wheel run slowly.

"That's a habit with the black race," replied Jess, smiling. Soon he added: "You seem to be pretty busy."

"I am. We have a piece of cloth in the loom that we need, and not filling enough to finish it. I'm usually busy, though. I like to work. It's about all there is to do out here."

Then, after adjusting her spindle, she went on:

"I came out three years ago from Kentucky, just after I'd left school. It seems a long time, and if I hadn't had plenty of work to keep me busy, it would have seemed longer, I've no doubt. Are you going far?"

"I don't know. As far as Austin, perhaps. I want to find work as a cowboy. Think I'd like that. I'm fond of riding. Later I may go to California, if I run across a good chance. I've been wanting to go for a year or two."

"Have you? I've got a brother out there — my only very near living relative. He went out in '49, just after gold was discovered, and while I was in school. We hear from him two or three times a year. He has made some money, but not enough to return home with. As soon as he makes a strike he's coming by for me, and we'll go back to Kentucky to live. I hope it won't be long. We heard from him only about two weeks ago — very unexpectedly, too. And, by the way, you might be interested in that."

Jess looked at her questioningly.

"Three Californians camped out there in the woods for a few days. They'd made a strike together, and cleaned up several thousand dollars apiece; and they've come to Texas to buy cattle. They're going to take a big drove through to California. Cattle are very cheap here, but very high out there, and they're expecting to make a barrel of money. They wanted drivers, and they were willing to pay good wages to good men, they said."

Jess sprang up eagerly. "That would just suit me!" he exclaimed. "Where did they go?"

"Down toward Little River, between here and Austin. They were told they could buy all the steers they wanted down there."

"I must overtake them. That's on my road anyhow. What kind of an outfit did they have?"

"They were on horseback themselves, but they had a wagon, three yoke of oxen and a driver. The driver was a cook too, but they took most of their meals with us while they were here. As it happened, they had all known my brother out there, and naturally we were very glad to have them with us. One of them, Mr. Gregory, had been on a prospecting trip with my brother. But that was two years ago."

"Had they always lived in California?"

"No. Mr. Burgess went out from Illinois, and Mr. Gregory from Missouri. Mr. Johnson — I've forgotten where he was from. He spoke of having lived in several different States. They're all nice men, or

seem to be; and they're all men of good education. Mr. Gregory is especially pleasant. He's a college graduate, and has been admitted to the bar. But when the gold excitement broke out, he swapped his law-books for a pick and a shovel, as he describes it, and made for the Pacific coast. If you find the party, please tell them I sent you."

"I'll not forget to do that," Jess assured her.

This was interesting news that he had just heard, and he asked many questions about the three cattle-buyers. And long after the girl had stopped the wheel, turning its spindle-point to the wall, and gone to another cabin to sleep, he sat gazing into the fire and thinking over the wonderful trip he was already hoping to take.

Hour after hour stole by. The wakeful dogs outside barked now and then, at nothing in particular. Every time he felt himself growing drowsy, Jess sprang up, took down a gun, and went out for a few minutes. After strolling around the cabins, and visiting both his pony and the horse-pen, he would return indoors and sit by the fire again.

But the whole night was not to pass so uneventfully.

At length the dogs began to bark, loudly and fiercely now. Jess armed himself and hurried out to learn what was the matter. They were barking toward the woods. But what they saw or heard could only be guessed; for he himself, though he listened long and intently, failed to detect any suspicious sound.

Finally, as the dogs kept up their ravings, he de-

cided to go in and arouse the negro. Tim was very hard to wake. But when once he knew what was wanted, he sprang up eagerly and reached for his gun. Together the young white man and the slave passed out and stole cautiously about the premises. They made a circuit of the horse-pen, and stopped by some stables to listen.

“Dey’s somebody close aroun’ some’r’s, sho’s you bawn; but I cain’t heah nuffin,” Tim finally said. “Reckon maybe de dawgs smells ’im.”

CHAPTER II

A DANGEROUS SNAPPING HOG

AFTER a time the dogs grew quiet, and the two men went back to the fire. For an hour they sat talking. Tim was telling of the troubles they had had with the Comanches during the five years since his master had settled here. When at length the black man grew silent and began to nod, Jess told him to lie down and go to sleep again. And he did.

Hour after hour crept by, and the fire burned down to a bed of coals. Jess put on more wood, then tilted his rawhide-bottomed chair back against the wall and fell into a doze. How long he sat there he did not know, but he was aroused by a furious outburst on the part of the dogs. Springing up, he seized a gun and started out to investigate.

But just then Adams, who had been awakened by the frightful clamor, came through the partition-door with his boots in his hand.

"Wait a minute, and I'll go with you," he said to Jess, as he began to jerk on his boots.

Passing out, they advanced cautiously, with their guns held in readiness to shoot, toward where the dogs had gathered. It was at a point thirty or forty yards from the house. The dogs were inside the fence, but there was a clump of bushes in the fence-corner out-

side, and it was plain that whatever they were barking at was among the bushes. The dogs were raging, the horses running around their pen and snorting, and the whole air seemed charged with alarm.

Adams and Jess approached the dogs cautiously, stooping low, and speaking only in whispers. When within a yard or two of the fence they tried to peer between the rails, but there was not light enough to see what was under the bushes. Presently Adams straightened up and burst out laughing.

"Such a to-do about nothing!" he exclaimed, dropping his gun to the ground. "It's only my old boar. He's a savage old fellow; would rather fight than run any day. Don't you hear 'im snapping his teeth?"

Sure enough, above the clamor of the dogs Jess could distinguish a peculiar sound, like an angry, defiant boar's tusks clicking together.

Adams drove the dogs away, scolding them to silence, and the two men walked back to the house. The night was now far advanced, and neither of them went to bed. Breakfast was ready at daylight. After eating, Jess was taken to a little cabin in the yard, where he slept till noon.

As he was coming out of the cabin, Adams met him.

"We've heard some news," the settler remarked. "A good-sized band of redskins was seen moving toward the northwest this morning early, with a drove of stolen horses. So I guess we're rid of the varmints for a while, and can stir about once more. And that's not all. Come out here. I want to show you

the tracks of that hog we heard snapping his teeth together last night."

They walked over to the fence, and the settler pointed to some dust that the chickens had scratched up under the bushes. Two large-sized, peculiarly-shaped prints were plainly visible in it. Jess stared at them.

"What are they?" he inquired at length.

"Moccasin-tracks."

The young fellow fairly gasped as he realized what this meant.

"It seems that the sneaking red rascal had crawled up here for some purpose, when the dogs discovered 'im," the settler was saying. "While we were standing here he was squatting under the bushes there, snapping his gun at us, and doing his best to shoot us. I've got an old boar out in the woods that never utters a sound when the dogs get after him; but he just stands at bay and pops his tusks together. I never would have found out that it wasn't the boar, I guess; but I happened to tell Tim about how the dogs acted, and he got suspicious and looked under the bushes for signs. The redskin must have had a flint-lock gun. And either the flint was bad or he had spilt out his priming powder. It's a lucky thing for us. Even in the dark he couldn't well have missed both of us, close as we stood to 'im."

Jess was half dazed as he reflected how near one of them — they would never know which one — had come to death's door. Their narrow escape and the strange

mistake they had made were the sole topics of conversation at the dinner-table.

After dinner Jess announced that he must continue his journey. He was urged to stay a few days longer, or at least till next morning; but his reply was:

"The Indians are gone now, and it's as safe to travel as it will be soon. And I'm eager to overtake those Californians. The longer I wait the more likely they'll be to have all the hands they need before I find them."

So he saddled his horse, said good-bye to the hospitable settler and his family, and mounted and rode away.

After a ride through the woods, he arrived at the Brazos. Forging the stream, he came upon a little collection of log-cabins, which, standing where an Indian village had stood but a few years earlier, had borrowed a name from the Indians and was known as Waco.

His horse had manifested signs of getting tender-footed, and Jess stopped at a blacksmith shop to have him shod. The animal was fairly gentle, at least for a Texas horse; but, like some other gentle horses, he resented having his hoofs rasped and hammered. Waiting for a good opportunity, he let fly with both hind legs and sent the blacksmith rolling and tumbling twenty feet. Having been close to the horse's legs, the man was not particularly hurt, but he was fairly bursting with wrath. Back into the shop he marched, savagely knocking the dirt from his clothes, and no

amount of persuasion could induce him to approach the horse again.

So Jess mounted the unshod animal and rode on his way, carrying with him the comical picture of a puffing, red-faced, dust-covered, loud-swearing little blacksmith, which long years could not dim.

Every settler Jess talked with warned him to look out for Indians; and he was constantly on his guard, day and night. Settlements were few and far between. When one was to be found, he stopped for night at a house. And he was always warmly welcomed and kindly treated, without money and without price. A more hospitable people than these frontiersmen probably never lived. Indeed, some of them, weary of loneliness, would almost beg him to stay with them a few days for company. But he was eager to get on.

Once night overtook him far from any settlement. He went off from the road and camped, hiding his camp in a deep ravine, and sleeping rolled in his blanket by his camp-fire.

At length he began to make inquiries for the Californians, and was not long in hearing of them. Changing his course, he struck off across the country toward where they were reported to be.

One day at noon he rode up to a camp at the edge of the timber, where the prairie came down close to a stream called Little River. The camp consisted of a tent and a covered wagon. Half a dozen oxen were grazing near by, some hobbled, and one belled. Several horses were staked not far away. Out on the

prairie, perhaps a mile off, a good-sized herd of cattle could be seen grazing, the herder sitting on his horse near them. Farther down the valley stood some high, strong rail-pens.

Jess had found the cattle-buyers' camp. He wondered anxiously if he had come too late.

There were only two men in the camp, and the young traveler easily recognized both of them. Miss Sally Adams had described them to him. As Jess reined up his horse, one of the men came out, walking with a slight limp. He was between thirty-five and forty years of age, had a rather serious, thoughtful face, with sandy hair, and wore a short sandy beard. He happened to turn his head, and Jess noticed that his neck was much scarred.

The two nodded to each other, and Jess said:

"Is this Mr. Burgess, from California?"

The man nodded again. "What can I do for you?"

"I've been told that you wanted hands to drive cattle. Have you engaged all you need?"

"No, we haven't — not half enough." The man came closer. "How much experience have you had?"

"None at all as a cowboy, but I've been used to stock all my life. I've driven hogs and sheep and cattle and horses, and I think I can make you a first-class hand."

"Can you ride?"

"I've always been counted a good rider," Jess answered, with some satisfaction.

"Are you hardy? Can you stand a great deal?"

"As much as the next man."

Burgess looked the applicant over critically. "How would you like to go through to California with us?"

"That would suit me all right, I think. In fact, I know it would."

"Well, if you want to start in at a dollar a day for a few days, till we see what you can do, you may get down and unsaddle."

Jess dismounted at once. After staking out his horse, he returned to the camp, and the cook announced that dinner was ready.

The cook was a young fellow, very fat, with light hair, a fair, smooth face, and colorless eyes. What his real name was Jess never knew. Some one had bestowed upon him the nickname of Granny, which he accepted cheerfully; and Granny he was always called by everybody in the camp.

While the three were eating, Burgess outlined his plans to Jess:

"We expect to buy twenty-five hundred steers, three-year-olds and up," he said. "We already have a thousand head of them under herd out there on the prairie. When we first camped here, we sent out word that we would pay eight dollars apiece for three-year-olds and ten dollars apiece for four-year-olds and older. And several gangs of cowboys are scouring the country, delivering beeves to us as fast as they can round them up. The cattle are delivered at those pens down yonder. Our business is to look them over, accept

what we want, then put our road-brand on them, turn them into our herd and keep them there."

"What route do you expect to follow to California?" Jess wanted to know.

Burgess took a book out of his pocket, opened it, and unfolded a map.

"We'll drive north from here to Fort Gibson, in the Indian Territory. There we'll outfit — lay in our supplies; several wagon-loads of them. Then we'll turn up the Arkansas River and keep company with that almost to the mountains. After leaving the Arkansas we'll travel along the foot of the Rockies. Somewhere up here we'll intercept the Overland Trail, and go by way of Fort Laramie, here, and Great Salt Lake, here."

Jess studied the map. "That's a long, long journey. And it's a great distance out of the way, too."

"Yes; fifteen hundred or two thousand miles out of the way, I suppose. But it's the best we can do. This southern route, through western Texas and Arizona, is impassable. Few wagon-trains attempt to travel it. It's impossible for us. The Apaches would be troublesome; and then there are too many deserts — long stretches of waterless, grassless country. The cattle would all die on our hands before we covered half the distance. This is a case where the longest way is the nearest."

CHAPTER III

ROUNDING UP LONGHORNS

SOON after they had finished eating, Burgess said:

"Now we'll saddle up and go and relieve the herder, till he can come to his dinner. Your horse is tired; you'd better ride that gray lariatied yonder. He's not as gentle as he might be, but you can manage him, I've no doubt. Put your saddle-bags and blanket in the tent. There may come up a shower."

Jess soon had the gray bridled and saddled. Then he mounted. But just as he was throwing his leg over, the animal gave a forward lunge, and Jess came down behind the saddle. At the second jump he bounced up and came down in front of the saddle, on the horse's neck. The next thing he knew he was picking himself up out of the grass, three or four yards away.

He was not hurt, but his face was red with mortification. This was a pretty start for a young fellow who had just declared himself a good rider. He glanced at Burgess, half expecting to see him laughing. But the Californian had evidently had no intention of playing a joke on his new hand; for there was nothing but surprise on his grave face. Not so Granny, the cook. He was standing with his hands on his hips, shaking his fat sides gleefully. Jess caught the horse again.

"He never did that before when the boys got on him," Burgess remarked.

"Knows when he's got a green hand to deal with," laughed Granny.

"If you want to you can take your saddle off and put it on the brown horse yonder," said Burgess. "He won't —"

But Jess was already climbing the gray again. He got into the saddle this time, and stayed there, hanging on tenaciously if not skillfully. After a minute or two of vicious bucking, the horse gave up his attempts to unseat his rider, and there was no further trouble.

"Took me by surprise the first time," laughed Jess, apologetically, as he rode back to where Burgess was standing.

The Californian seemed rather pleased at the outcome of the matter. Leaving his horse, he went into the tent and came out with a pair of saddle-bags. Jess wondered why he was taking those; and he wondered still more when he saw Burgess lift them upon his horse. Evidently they were heavy. Afterwards he learned that they were heavy with gold — California gold — sixty or seventy pounds of it. It was the money the partners were using to buy cattle.

"Can one herder take care of all these thousand steers?" inquired Jess, as he and Burgess were approaching the herd.

"Yes, in the daytime. They don't give much trouble; or at least they haven't so far. They soon learn to stay together."

After the herder had galloped away toward the camp, Burgess and Jess rode slowly around the steers, which were scattered over many acres. Some of them were grazing and some lying in the tall grass. They were all large-sized animals, with long legs and great spreading horns. Every one of them wore a conspicuous new brand somewhere on his hip — a circle with a horizontal bar across it. There were also some horses mingled with the cattle.

"You rebrand all your steers, I see," Jess remarked.

"Yes, every animal that enters this herd must wear our road-brand, the bar-circle, no matter what other brands he may be ornamented with."

As soon as the herder returned, Burgess and Jess started back to camp. But before they arrived there, distant shouts reached their ears. Several horsemen were driving a bunch of cattle up the valley toward the branding-pen.

"The boys didn't have anything to do this morning, so they went out on a round-up of their own," Burgess remarked. "We can buy steers cheaper by taking them on the range, but we don't usually have time for that. I see they're bringing in about a hundred head. Let's ride down to the pen."

They rode down and waited, and when the cattle came helped to get them into the enclosure. Then all the men went up to camp, where they unsaddled, and those who had just returned ate their dinners.

Among the new-comers were Burgess's partners, Gregory and Johnson. Johnson was a black-haired,

swarthy-faced man, who had little to say. But Gregory, who was scarcely thirty, was very different. He was a good-looking fellow, with light-brown hair, a blonde mustache, and a frank, open face. He talked a great deal, joking incessantly, and kept everybody laughing during the meal.

Afterwards he came over to Jess, who was standing by the wagon, and said:

"Burgess tells me you're thinking of going through with us to California."

"I will if I can give you satisfaction. I'm pretty green at this business." Jess was recalling his experience with the gray horse.

"Oh, don't let that worry you." Then coming closer, Gregory said, confidentially: "The fact of the matter is, we're all rather green. Ed Simpson, that tall, red-haired fellow yonder, is the only first-class cowboy in the party. He's a fine rider and a good roper. The rest of us, and especially we three partners, are new to the business. But we can all learn — of course we can! And you don't want to miss that trip. It's well worth the taking for itself. And you don't want to miss California, either. It's a great country. Every man has a chance to make a fortune there. Do you live around here?"

Jess explained that he was traveling, and told where he was from.

"So I see. And how did you happen to come to us?"

"Why, I heard of you away back yonder beyond the

Brazos. I stayed all night with a settler named Adams, and they told me about you, and that you wanted hands."

"Stayed all night at Adams's, did you?" exclaimed Gregory, eagerly. "And how is the pretty Mormon?"

"Who's that?"

"Why, Miss Sally Adams."

"Well, she's as pretty as ever. But I didn't know she was a Mormon."

"Yes; they're all Mormons. I don't know whether she's very strong in the faith or not; but her uncle and aunt are. Some Mormon missionaries came through the country a year ago and converted them. The family didn't say much on the subject themselves; but I heard a lot of talk about it over at that little town, Waco."

"Well, Mormons or what not, they're clever people," declared Jess.

"Indeed they are! And they don't make finer girls than Miss Sally Adams. I expect to stop and see her again as we go back."

The whole party, except Burgess and Granny, now started down to the branding-pen, some of them leading saddled horses.

While one man kindled a little fire and put the branding-iron to heat, Ed Simpson got into the pen and roped a big steer. Then, with the assistance of all the other hands, Jess among them, the animal was partly driven and partly dragged to one side of the

pen, and tied to a post. A rope was now put round his hind legs and pulled till he fell to the ground. After the hot iron had been applied to his hip, he was untied. As he bounded up, he was rushed through a gate into a smaller pen, where he stood shaking his head wrathfully. The chief reason for putting him out was that it would not be safe for any human being to venture into the pen with him for a while. The same process was gone through with the other steers, each in turn.

Not all the cattle in the big pen were to be branded. Some of them were cows, and had only been brought because it was easier to drive them than to cut them out. After such steers as were wanted had passed under the hot iron, receiving the bar-circle, the smaller pen was opened and they were driven out upon the prairie to the herd, to become part of it. The cattle not wanted were also turned out, and started off in another direction.

By this time another party of cowboys, in the employ of a neighboring ranchman, were approaching with more cattle. This drove, too, was penned, and such of them as the buyers accepted were branded and added to the big herd.

Late in the afternoon Jess and two other hands went to help bring the herd down to the river to water. Afterwards the cattle were driven out upon the prairie again.

At dusk began Jess's experience as a night-herder. For three hours he and an older hand rode slowly



BRANDING THE STEERS.

around the cattle, in opposite directions. The herd lay quietly in the grass, and the watch passed uneventfully.

The days that followed were hard, busy days for Jess and all the Bar-Circle "Outfit." When not branding steers they were riding the range, helping with the round-up. One morning as Jess was saddling his horse, Burgess came to him and said:

"Well, we've all three decided that you're one of the boys we want to take through with us. We like the way you grab hold and push things. We'll pay you five hundred dollars in gold to make the trip. That's on condition that you stick to us, understand. If you drop out anywhere on the way, not a cent do you get. What do you say?"

Jess took a few moments to consider the proposition, but spent them congratulating himself. He would have gone for much less.

"All right, Mr. Burgess. Your offer sounds fair, and I accept it. You can count on me to see the thing through, if it's possible. And I'll do my level best." So the matter was settled.

Day after day the work of receiving and branding steers went on. New hands were hired and added to the force from time to time. Steadily the big herd out on the prairie grew bigger, and steadily Burgess's gold-weighted saddle-bags grew lighter.

Then at last, well on toward the first of May, word went out from the camp that no more steers were wanted. The herd had been counted, and found to

number a few more than twenty-five hundred head.

Next morning, just at sunrise, the Bar-Circle Outfit started northward, on that long, roundabout journey to the Pacific coast. The cattle, bawling noisily, were strung out for a mile or more; and on each side of them mounted cowboys were galloping up and down, shouting and cracking their whips. Jess rode near the head of the line, to guide the ponderous caravan in its course. In the wake of the cattle came the white-topped wagon, drawn by three yoke of oxen, and driven by Granny the cook.

As the sequel proved, the big drove of longhorns would never reach its intended destination. But it would travel long and far; and those who went with it, both owners and hired hands, would undergo many hardships and many exciting, perilous experiences in their vain endeavor to get the beeves through to the land of gold and convert them into nuggets.

CHAPTER IV

ON A LONG, LONG TRAIL

IT was a glorious day, that first day on the march. The sky was cloudless and wonderfully blue. The air, clear as crystal, was mildly soft yet bracingly cool. The sun was flooding the earth with his splendor. And the groves and the prairies and the timber-fringed streams winding serpent-like through the prairies, were all arrayed in the newest, brightest green of spring. Great patches of wild flowers spotted the landscape with their gorgeous hues, and laded the air with their fragrance. The morning was musical with the voices of larks and other merry songsters.

To Jess Holloway, galloping up and down by the long, steadily tramping line, it seemed that he had never before really known what a wonderful thing it was to live. As his eyes swept the great wilderness of prairies, untouched by the hand of man, his heart swelled and swelled, and his pulses bounded like the half-wild horse under him. Every shout he uttered at the cattle was a shout of exultation. The whole future seemed radiant with golden possibilities. Unknown lands, teeming with unknown wonders, were beckoning him on, on, on!

To his imagination the long, long trail the caravan had started on stretched before him, in more or less

distinct vision, for thousands of miles. Yonder it crossed great, far-reaching plains. Farther on it wound along the foot of a mountain-range whose snow-hooded peaks wrapped themselves in clouds. Still farther, and it was threading deep, wild canyons, by roaring streams or silent lakes, or climbing over rugged mountain-passes. And then at last it came to an end on the shore of the great ocean, where crystal streams rippled over sands sparkling with gold.

It was a splendid picture that he saw through the glamour of youth and inexperience — a wonderful picture; far more pleasing, certainly, than the reality would have been. For in it appeared no long, weary days of hard riding, and no long, stormy nights of watching; no swollen streams, wide and dark and swift-flowing, to be crossed; no forced marches, through clouds of dust, over waterless, sun-parched regions; no wild midnight stampedes; no savages lying in wait for scalps and plunder. And it was better, perhaps, that those things were hid from his eyes.

The owners of the drove, being still short of hands for the trip, had hired several cowboys to go with them for a day or two, till the cattle had reached a well-traveled road and had learned to drive. But even with these Jess had to look after a few hundred yards of steers on his side. Back and forth he dashed, with the jangle of spurs, cracking his whip over the lag-gards, lashing into line those that tried to drop out, and shouting his cheerful "Hu-y! hu-y! hu-u-y! hup! hup!" at the whole drove. Sometimes the leaders,



AWAY JESS WOULD DASH AFTER HIM.

tempted by the rich pasturage, would turn aside to graze, and he must spur to the front to push them back into the road.

Every now and then a big steer, deciding that he was getting altogether too far from home, would break out of the drove and start off across the prairie at the top of his speed. Away Jess would dash after him. The steer could run well, but the horse could run faster. After a race of a few hundred yards, the big longhorn would be headed off and turned back. Soon he would be making for the drove as fast as he had left it, with the cowboy's lash stinging his hams at every jump to teach him the folly of such conduct.

Once during the forenoon a big black, surly-looking brute, at the edge of the drove, suddenly made a lunge at Jess's horse. The mustang, seeing his danger, gave a terrific bound that nearly unseated his rider, and even then barely escaped being disemboweled by those great horns!

Jess wheeled angrily, six-shooter in hand. But bethinking himself, he exchanged the weapon for his whip; and not till the black fellow had dived deep into the drove did he elude the fury of that biting lash.

"That's a wicked beast!" called out Ed Simpson, who had witnessed the attack from the opposite side of the drove. "He lunged at me not half an hour ago. I tried to split his hide. We'll remember him when we need fresh beef."

Other cowboys were scattered along the line, on both sides, at intervals of a few hundred yards. And

very busy every one of them was kept this first morning. Of the three partners, Gregory and Johnson did their full share of hard work, galloping here and there, and chasing runaway steers as recklessly as did any of their hands. Burgess, mounted on a big brown horse, rode at the rear end of the line, and also assisted with the driving. But all the fast riding he left to others.

The chief reason for this was that those gold-weighted saddle-bags, which seldom got out of his reach, were fastened behind his saddle. They had been greatly lightened to pay for the big drove of beeves, but were still heavy enough to be very valuable.

Many interested glances were cast toward that pair of leather bags; and among the hands no little speculation was indulged in, privately, as to how much gold they really contained. Several, with vague ideas of such things, insisted that there must be a fabulous sum in them — a hundred or two hundred thousand dollars. But Jess, who had handed them up to Burgess, guessed that they still contained six or eight, or possibly ten, thousand dollars. And in addition to this sum, he afterwards learned that each of the partners carried a thousand or two in gold belted around him, under his clothes.

The cattle, restless from having been kept under herd, traveled at a brisk gait; and when stopped for noon they were a dozen miles and more from the camp on Little River. Some of them had given much trouble with their repeated attempts to escape, and

had had to be watched constantly. But none had actually got away; and even the worst soon learned to accept the inevitable. After that they tramped on steadily.

The halt for noon lasted two hours. While the cattle were resting and grazing, Granny prepared dinner, and the hungry cowboys ate it. The tired horses had already been turned loose, and before the time for taking up the march again fresh ones were caught and saddled. All the loose horses, of which there were a hundred and more, were driven with the cattle.

Then came the afternoon drive, lasting till the sun was only an hour or two above the western horizon. Now a stop was made for the night. By the time darkness had obscured the prairie, the cattle had grazed their fill of the abundant grass, and were ready to lie down in it. Unless disturbed, they would lie quietly until morning.

It was a jaded, sweat-wet lot of horses that were turned loose to graze at the end of that afternoon drive; and it was a tired, hungry lot of cowboys that threw themselves down on the grass, near the camp-fire, to rest while Granny was preparing supper. The day had been a trying one for everybody.

Even the fat, cheerful Granny was grumbling aloud as he trudged back and forth between the fire and the wagon. Some one had been joking about their camp-fare.

"Don't see how you could expect a feller to wrastle with three yoke of half-wild oxens all day long, and

then do a decent job of cookin' at night," retorted the cook.

"That's right, Granny," spoke up Burgess. "As I've told you, you shall be relieved of your ox-driving the first minute I can find a suitable man for the wagon. I'm looking out for one all the time. Until I do find a wagon-driver, you'll have to do the best you can."

"If I hadn't been doin' anything but gallop around on a horse all day, I wouldn't know what tired was," went on Granny, who, though he had hired as a cook, had well-known ambitions toward becoming a cowboy.

"But the horse would have a broken back," spoke up Ed Simpson.

"Of course!" put in Gregory. "We haven't an animal in the herd that can carry more than half a ton." This in allusion to Granny's weight.

These were but the opening shots preceding a volley of jokes and gibes. For the fat cook's aspirations toward cowboyhood were the source of endless amusement in the camp. But little cared the complacent Granny, who went about his business serenely undisturbed by anything said. Sometimes he answered and sometimes merely ignored his tormentors. And not for a moment did he put aside his ambition to become a cowboy.

There was less joking than usual to-night, for all but the hardiest hands were too tired to joke. Supper was eaten at dusk, and not long afterwards the whole party sought their blankets. Jess, as unwearied, apparently, as he had been in the morning, was the last

to go to bed. And he would have remained up longer if there had been anybody left to talk to.

At midnight he was awakened for his turn at night-herding. His horse was staked not far away, and he had soon saddled and mounted and begun his two hours' ride. There was another man on duty at the same time, and they rode slowly round and round the herd, not together, but in opposite directions. It was a still, clear night, rather chilly, and lighted only by the stars.

The cattle were scattered over many acres, and every steer of the twenty-five hundred seemed to be lying in the grass. The horses, which were driven with the cattle during the day, had gone off to themselves and were still grazing. They would stay together; and as those that had been ridden were too tired to travel far, there was little need to watch them.

Round and round the silent, cud-chewing herd of longhorns rode the two cowboys, keeping scarcely a dozen yards from the outermost steers. Sometimes they whistled and sometimes they sang. Twice on every round they met and passed each other. Usually they stopped to exchange a few words.

"Well, everything seems to be all right so far," Jess remarked at one of these meetings, when their watch was nearly ended. "Guess there's no danger of a stampede to-night."

"No telling, no telling," replied the other herder, one of the temporary hands, and an experienced cowboy. "A drove of Texas steers at night is worse than

a powder-barrel. Only one thing will set off powder — fire. Keep that away, and powder is as harmless as dirt. But anything, or nothing at all, can set off a lot of longhorns. You never know what minute they'll be up and gone. The only safe way is to take it for granted they're bound to go, and be ready for 'em all the time."

The wisdom of this advice was impressed upon Jess very soon afterwards. He and the other herder continued their rounds; but scarcely were they out of sight of each other when, with a simultaneous movement as it seemed, every steer in the herd bounded to his feet.

Jess's horse gave a frightened jump and tried to run. But, to the young cowboy's surprise, the cattle stood in their tracks. He gripped his bridle-rein and waited, thinking that a genuine stampede was on. Soon the other herder began to sing, and Jess himself, acting on the suggestion, fell to whistling a cheerful air.

Within a few minutes some of the steers were dropping down; and by the time Jess and his fellow-herder had been relieved by the next watch, all the cattle were lying quietly in the grass again.

Soon after daylight the steers got up and began to graze; and they kept grazing till between eight and nine o'clock. Then commenced the day's march.

The cattle were now becoming accustomed to the new order of things, and gave far less trouble than at first. When night came, it was decided that the temporary hands could be spared as well now as later, and next morning they all took the back trail.

This left fewer than a dozen drivers to look after the twenty-five hundred steers — an entirely inadequate force, especially in bad weather. The partners were making constant inquiries for hands to go through to California, and were offering good wages for the right men. There were applicants at nearly every settlement; but most of them were so inexperienced, or their appearance gave so little promise of their being able to make a long, hard trip, that but one or two had been engaged so far, and those only on trial.

Before the temporary hands turned back, Ed Simpson had been on the opposite side of the drove from Jess, to help guide the cattle. But now Ed fell to the rear, leaving Jess to look after the whole forward end of the line. If the leaders took it into their heads to turn out on the other side of the road, he must gallop entirely around them to push them back. As he had a few hundred yards of the line to look after, this required no end of hard riding. Indeed, he was always going, and always going at a gallop. In no other way could he keep the cattle in line and in the road.

By the middle of the forenoon drive his horse was much jaded, and he had to ride back and change his saddle to a fresh one. So he did at noon, and so in the middle of the afternoon. He also rode still another horse while doing herd-duty at night.

The weather continued fine on this third day of the drive, and the cattle were fairly well behaved, at least for longhorns. But even then the riders had a hard day of it. When the afternoon drive was ended, and

the steers had been permitted to scatter over the prairie to graze, most of the hands and the three partners were glad to come to the camp and throw themselves down on the grass to rest. Ed Simpson, Jess and Granny were the only cheerful members of the party.

The days that followed were but repetitions of this day. The brunt of the hard work fell on Ed Simpson and Jess, not because they were more willing than the others, but because they could stand more. Back and forth and here and there and everywhere they dashed, never sparing their horses. Four times every day, and sometimes oftener, they shifted their saddles to fresh mounts.

All the horses were hardy, and most of them were half-wild fellows, constantly on the alert for an opportunity to break their riders' necks. Very seldom did one of them suffer himself to be mounted without more or less bucking. Jess had got used to this and managed to keep his seat somehow. Ed Simpson, who was ten years older than Jess, and had taken a great liking to him, gave him many useful suggestions.

"Limber up there, boy! Limber! limber! limber as a rag!" he shouted one morning, as he caught sight of Jess sitting stiff as a poker on a bucking mustang. "Every time he jumps, let yourself flop! He'll break your back that way!"

This advice seemed hard to take at first, with his nerves as tense as they were; but Jess tried it, and was delighted to find it much easier. Relaxing at the right

moment, he soon learned, was the secret of riding wild horses. From this time on he ceased to dread those terrific buckings.

Ed also gave Jess much good advice about the ways and weaknesses of cattle, taught him how to throw a rope, and spared no pains to make a first-class cowboy of him. And Jess was not only sensible enough to take the advice, but he learned so fast that he was soon able to equal his teacher. In endurance he had proved himself Ed's equal from the start; and nobody else in the party could approach either of them.

All the other hands and the three owners admitted that they were worn out by the time the drove stopped for night. But Ed scoffed at the idea of being tired, and Jess showed not the slightest signs of it. In fact, he now took Phil Gregory's place in keeping up the life of the camp. Gregory declared that he was past making a joke, and nearly past laughing at one. The hard riding was telling on him.

CHAPTER V

A MORMON MIGRATION TO GREAT SALT LAKE

ONE morning Burgess awoke just at daylight. Besides the herders with the cattle, but two people were up: Granny, busy with breakfast, and Jess, who was throwing a rope at a stump. He was ambitious to become an expert roper.

"Jess, do you never get tired?" asked Burgess. "You were still up when I went to bed, you were up two hours with the cattle, and now you are up again."

Jess hurled his rope and watched the noose settle over the top of the stump, then said:

"Mr. Burgess, to tell you the truth, I never was very tired but once in my life, and that was when I was a chunk of a boy." He went to take his rope off the stump.

"I believe it," growled Johnson, who slept with Burgess. "The boy's made of iron and rawhide. He's just a walking bundle of git-up-and-git. He can run us all to death and then joke about it. He rode down six horses yesterday — rode a hundred miles if he rode an inch. And now just look at him!"

Jess had released his rope and was coming back for another throw.

"How long do you sleep, Jess?" Burgess wanted to know.

"About five hours. I can get along with four.

After sleeping five hours I get restless and want to crawl out."

"Five hours! No wonder you can go late and early. What kind of work have you been used to, that makes you so hardy?"

"All kinds. We worked back in Tennessee. Hardest job I ever ran across, though, was a log-roll-ing. I used to attend so many of them every winter. That was work — sure-enough work. After holding a handspike and lifting at big logs all day, I own up I used to feel a little jaded by night. This driving cattle is just play to that." He went on with his rope-throwing.

"Lucky we've got two such fellows as Jess and Ed, till we find some more hands," said Johnson. "If I did as much riding as either of them, you'd have to haul me next day. This is a vastly bigger undertaking than I had any thought of when we started into it, though I knew it wouldn't be easy. And the worst is still to come."

"That's right, Jeddy," answered Burgess. "All of us will have our endurance stretched to the breaking-point before we reach our destination. We've got a big, up-hill job ahead of us. There's no denying that."

The Bar-Circle Outfit was now nearing the Brazos. One forenoon the head of the long, horned line, with Jess Holloway steering it, marched into the village on the river-bank — the village that was destined to grow and grow — Waco. Seeing the little blacksmith

standing in the door of his shop, Jess called out, above the trampling and bawling of the cattle:

"What would be the chance to get a hundred and fifty mustangs shod to-day?"

The blacksmith stared till he recognized the cowboy; then he shook his head angrily.

"No, sir! No, sir! None of your kind of horses for me! I'd ruther shoe buffaloes!" He dived into the shop and began to hammer his anvil loudly, spitefully.

It was only a joke — Jess had not wanted any horses shod. And he was laughing as he galloped on.

Down the Brazos-bank tramped the great-horned leaders of the drove, with their alert guide hovering near them. Into the water he plunged. The river was somewhat swollen, but still fordable. Once, out in the current, the lead-steers grew bewildered and headed up stream. Jess spurred through the water till he got round them, then he turned them back. Now they took the road of their own accord and moved on.

After Jess himself had climbed the bank, he reined up his horse and sat in the saddle, gazing back. A winding, moving line, of all colors and shades of color, but conspicuous chiefly for horns, stretched across the river, up the west bank, through the village, and on into the woods beyond. He stood still and watched it till the driver next behind him had plunged into the stream below the cattle. Then Jess wheeled and galloped on to overtake the head of the column.

Some time afterwards he found himself passing the Adams place. He looked toward the house, but saw nobody. Not even a dog ran out to bark. He wondered at this, but was too busy keeping the steers in line and guiding them through the woods to think much about anything else at the time. He had some thought of coming back.

Soon the head of the column emerged upon the prairie. It was now time to noon. Half a mile beyond the edge of the timber Jess galloped round the leaders, reined up in front of them, and turned them out of the road. They complied willingly, and at once scattered over the prairie, cropping the abundant pasturage as they went.

Jess sat on his horse and watched the horned stream flow out of the woods and spread itself over the prairie, far and wide. One after another the other drivers appeared. Finally the rear end of the line emerged into view, brought up by Burgess, with his golden saddle-bags, and others. And just behind them came Granny and his lumbering, white-topped wagon. The wagon stopped at the edge of the woods, in the shade of some post-oaks.

Jess now started toward the camp. On the way he tossed the noosed end of his lariat over a loose horse's head and led him away captive, to be ready for the afternoon drive. After tying the fresh animal to a bush, and unsaddling and turning loose the jaded one, he went on to the wagon. All the other men were already there.

"Did you stop and see the Adamses?" he inquired of Gregory.

"No, I didn't. Didn't have time. But I'm going back just as soon as I get my dinner. Want to go with me?"

"Yes, I do. But we may not find them at home. I didn't see a soul on the place."

"Neither did I. But there's somebody there, I guess."

Scarcely was dinner over when Gregory and Jess brushed their clothes and started back, on foot. It was only a few minutes' walk.

"There's the clump of bushes," Jess remarked, pointing to a fence-corner, as they neared the cabins. He had already told Gregory of his dangerous adventure with the snapping hog.

Entering the yard, they approached the largest cabin and knocked on its clapboard door. Again and again they knocked, without getting any response. Now they noticed that every door was closed, and that the whole place wore a deserted air. Jess peeped between the logs, and could make out that only a few of the household goods were still there.

"Why, the people have moved away," he said.

"Where can they have gone? They didn't mention moving to me," answered Gregory, evidently disappointed and bewildered.

"Nor to me. I don't understand it."

The two were still speculating about the matter, when they noticed a man coming through the woods,

with a long rifle on his shoulder. He climbed the fence and jumped down into the yard.

"You're looking for Adams, or some of his family, I guess. They're not here any more."

"So we've discovered," answered Gregory. "When did they go, and where?"

"They rolled out last week. They've left the country. They were headed east when they started from here; but they expect to reach Great Salt Lake before they stop."

"Oh, I see. Some Mormon business, eh?" asked Gregory.

"That's the size of it. A Mormon elder, or bishop, or high priest, or whatever they call 'im, passed through here and ordered Brother Adams to emigrate to Utah. And Brother Adams promptly sold his farm and his horses and his niggers for just what he could get for 'em, and then loaded up and yoked up and rolled out. I bought his place, dirt-cheap, and some of his house-fixings. Expect to move over here in a few days."

"I'm surprised," remarked Jess. "Adams seemed such a sensible fellow."

"He *was* a sensible fellow — when he was let alone. He wouldn't talk about the matter to any of us; but Aunt Car'line, his nigger woman — he sold her to a man just above here — she says the Mormon elder got a revelation straight from heaven that Brother Adams and his family must start for Salt Lake at once, or risk losing their souls. So there was nothing for them to

do but up stakes and travel. Aunt Car'line is purty sharp, and she thinks there's a bug under the chip — that the Mormon elder had his eyes on Adams's niece, Sally."

Gregory uttered an angry exclamation. "And so that's the way the wind blows, is it?" he said, disgustedly. "What kind of a looking fellow was the Mormon elder?"

"He was a big man, with a big, bushy beard and —"

"And with eight or ten wives already!" added Gregory, wrathfully. "I know all of his breed. I've been through their country twice."

"Aunt Car'line might have imagined some of that," remarked the settler, seeing that Gregory was interested in the girl. "I understand the Mormons are gathering to Salt Lake from all parts of the world. Sally didn't want to go, though, Aunt Car'line says. The Mormon elder went off with 'em from here."

Gregory strode back and forth across the yard, saying uncomplimentary things of the whole Mormon tribe in general, and of the bearded harem-makers in particular.

"Come on, Jess, and let's get back to camp," he finally said, in tones full of disgust.

"Reckon you didn't hear about Tim, did you?" the settler called after them. When they had turned he explained:

"Adams sold Tim, that nigger man of his, to a settler named Evans, across the river. Then Evans up and sold 'im to a fellow that proposed to take 'im to

Louisiana, to work on a plantation. But none of that for Tim! The only thing he hates worse than a plow is a hoe. Before anybody guessed what he was up to, he slipped out his gun and ammunition and disappeared — took to the woods. Nobody has seen hair or hide of 'im since."

"Good for Tim!" cried Gregory, mostly by way of relieving his already disordered feelings.

"He's a fine hunter, Tim is," continued the settler. "They've looked high and low for 'im, but not a trace can they find. I'm guessing that he's made tracks for the unsettled country to the northwest. He always wanted to go out there on a hunt. The game is just swarming out there, they say — everything from squirrels to buffaloes. And he didn't have any family, or any kinfolks around here, Tim didn't. As long as his ammunition holds out, he can take care of himself anywhere. That is, if he don't run across some redskins."

Gregory now inquired what road Adams had taken. On being told, he and Jess passed out at the gate and walked on toward their camp.

"Jess," Gregory finally said, breaking a lengthy silence, "I don't mind telling you that I was very much interested in that girl."

"I had already guessed that," was the reply. "And she was interested in you."

"How do you know, Jess?"

"Not from what she said, but from the way she kept talking about you. I sat up on guard after the

others had gone to bed, the night I stopped there, and she stayed up to spin — in the same room. It was then that she told me about your party. She was a fine girl."

"Indeed she was — indeed she is! In my partial opinion, I've never seen one that can approach her, good looks and everything else considered. And the very thought of her being caught in that Mormon elder's net, and spending her life in a Mormon harem, nearly drives me frantic."

"Maybe it won't be so bad as that, Mr. Gregory. You see —"

"Mr. Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the other, impatiently. "Jess, my name's Phil; and I'm not so very old — not thirty yet. Save your mistering for Burgess. He keeps up the dignity of the firm. I'm just one of the boys."

"All right, Phil," laughed Jess. "But, as I started to say, that may be a mistake about Miss Sally Adams and that harem business."

"No, it isn't, Jess. That black woman wouldn't have imagined that kind of a thing. I know just about what will happen. As soon as the party get beyond the reach of the State laws, that elder or bishop or whatever he is will receive one of his lying revelations to the effect that Sister Sally must marry him then and there, under penalty of losing her soul. That's a common trick with those fellows. And what can the girl do but consent, with such a fate as that hanging over her? That is, if she's deep enough in the de-

lusion to believe their blasphemous lies. And I'm afraid she is — I'm afraid she is."

Jess could think of nothing worth saying in reply. After a silence of a minute or two, Gregory spoke again:

"Jess, I wish I were out of this cattle business. There'd be no trip to California for me. I was tempted to drop out when I was here before; and if I'd had any inkling of this Mormon migration, Joe Burgess and Jeddy Johnson could have gone on alone. As it is, I'm tied hand and foot. And I don't suppose I shall ever see that girl again."

"No, I'm afraid not. But there are plenty of others," was the best consolation Jess could offer.

Gregory's reply was an impatient gesture. "What do I care about the others, Jess?" he demanded, half irritably. His companion only smiled.

Gregory was both discouraged and out of temper — needlessly so, too. For, if he had known it, they were destined to see not a little more of the Adams family before this journey was ended.

CHAPTER VI

MARCHING, MARCHING NORTHWARD

WHILE Jess and Gregory were away from the camp, three men, all eager to reach California, had applied for work as drivers, and Burgess had accepted them on trial. They were vigorous, active fellows, and everybody in the party had good expectations of them. They had to return to their homes to make some hasty preparations for the journey; but an hour or two later they overtook the Bar-Circle drove, placed what little baggage they had in the wagon, and helped with the rest of the afternoon drive.

Every man employed had to agree to stay up and guard the cattle the whole of every rainy or stormy night, if called upon. And the first test that Burgess usually applied to a new hand was to put him on herd duty all night long.

"The man that can't keep going a day and a night and another day, without winking or grumbling, is not the man for this trip," he often declared. And he was doubtless right.

As it would never do to leave the cattle in charge of untried herders at night, one or another of the experienced hands had to stay with the new one, to "break him in." This task usually devolved upon Ed Simpson or Jess. By way of evening things up, they

were allowed to ride in the wagon and sleep part of the next day, if they so desired, and everything was going well with the drove.

The first night after the three new hands had joined the outfit, Ed took one of them and kept him riding around the herd from dusk till dawn. Next night Jess did the same with another one. And on the night following Ed took another turn with the third man. All stood the test successfully. But at noon of the day after the last man's trial, one of the three came to the camp and said:

"Well, Mr. Burgess, I've decided to turn back."

"Why, what's the matter, Davis? Driving cattle too hard for you?"

"No, it's not the cattle; it's your tarnal mustangs I can't stand. I'm not much of a rider, anyway, and I've already been pitched off four times."

"Oh, don't let a little thing like that worry you. That's liable to happen to anybody. I'm not a brag rider myself."

"Well, I'd like to go to California; but if I've got to be bumped and jerked and pitched about every day of my life, till I don't know whether my head's up or my heels, Texas is good enough for me."

Burgess pulled at his mustache thoughtfully. "Well, then, how would you like to drive the wagon?"

"That would suit me to a T."

A bargain was soon struck, and Davis took charge of the oxen and wagon at once, relieving Granny the cook of his double duty.

That same day, soon after the afternoon drive was ended, Jess went off from the camp to stake out a horse he had just caught, to be used for night-herding; and while he was driving down the stake, a Mexican came to him. The fellow could speak but little English, but Jess finally learned his history, and what he had come for.

The Mexican had lived in California, while the country was still a part of Mexico. But he had got into debt and had been sold into bondage for a term of years. Afterwards he had been taken to Mexico, and brought from there to Texas, changing owners two or three times on the way. He had still two years and more of his bondage to serve. But his present owner, another Mexican, had but little work for him to do, and was willing to dispose of him at a bargain. The slave himself was eager to return to California; and having learned that the Bar-Circle Outfit was in need of hands, he had come to beg the owners to buy him, for the rest of his time, and take him with them. He was willing to do anything.

Jess asked the man many questions, and learned that he had been used to cattle all his life. In California he had lived and worked on ranches in the days when cattle were raised chiefly for their hides and tallow.

"All right; come with me," Jess said. And he took the Mexican to camp.

"Mr. Burgess, here's a man that wants to go through with us." And Jess explained what he had learned about the applicant.

Burgess asked the Mexican numerous questions. Finally he turned to Jess.

"What do you think of him?"

"With all his experience, he ought to make a useful hand."

"Do you want to try him to-night?"

"Just as soon as not."

"All right, then. What's your name?" He turned to the man.

"Soos," replied the Mexican.

His real name was Jesus, which — pronounced Haysoos — is not uncommon among his people.

So Jess and the new man patrolled the herd all night long. Soos was a good rider, and soon proved himself familiar with the ways of cattle. Late in the night he wanted to know — as most of the new hands did — why they two stayed up all night, instead of allowing the other cowboys to take turns. Jess explained that this was Burgess's test, and the Mexican rode on, well satisfied.

The two returned to camp at daylight. When breakfast was over, Burgess, after entrusting his precious saddle-bags to Johnson, mounted and rode off, accompanied by the Mexican on foot. They were going to call on Soos's owner.

Shortly before the time for the drove to start, both came back. The Mexican was almost beside himself with joy. For Burgess had not only bought the remainder of his time — nearly three years — but had promised that if Soos made a good hand till the cattle

were disposed of in California, that should end his period of servitude.

The swarthy fellow was so delighted that he persisted in telling everybody, in very bad English, how he had got into his present trouble. Again and again he assured the partners that he would be faithful. And it may be added here that, though events turned out very differently from what he or any of them now expected, he kept his word.

"If he happens to be a sorry cowboy, we can make a wagon-driver of him after we get to Fort Gibson," Burgess remarked to Johnson and Gregory. The Mexican had picked up a rope and started off to catch a horse.

But Soos, though scarcely as expert as a white man with the same experience would have been, proved himself entirely too useful with the drove to be put on a wagon.

With three new hands, and with both the cattle and the horses becoming every day better trained, the drivers were not so hard-worked as at first. But there was still plenty to do. Not for a minute had Granny given up his ambition to become a cowboy. And no sooner had he been relieved of driving the wagon than he began to worry Burgess.

"I'd ruther ride horseback anyhow," insisted the cook. "And what's the use of me layin' there in the wagon, sleepin' and sleepin', and gettin' fatter and fatter every day of my life, when I might just as well be 'doin' somethin'?"

This appealed to Gregory in more ways than one. Burgess was about to evade the matter, on some pretext, when Gregory said:

"That's right, Joe. I sympathize with Granny. Nobody wants to lie around till he gets as big as a hippopotamus. We must find something for him to do between camps, to keep him from accumulating fat. Better let him drive cattle."

"But there's no saddle," objected Burgess.

"I'll tell you, Joe. I've been losing a lot of sleep, and I'd like to ride in the wagon this morning and catch up. So Granny may use my saddle till noon."

"But what can he ride?" demanded Burgess. "He's no horse-breaker. He wouldn't climb any horse that would 'pitch' with him. And the few gentle horses we've got have been ridden too much lately."

"What's the matter with me throwin' a saddle on that mule?" demanded Granny. "Nobody else rides him. He's gentle enough for me."

"All right. If you want to ride the mule, go ahead," agreed Burgess. "He looks gentle enough. I guess he won't dump you off."

So Granny got a bridle and started out. The mule was the only one in the outfit. Burgess had bought him with a little drove of horses, not because he wanted him, but because the owner insisted upon selling all together. Nobody had ridden the mule as yet, but it was known that he had been under a saddle. The animal refused to be caught with a bridle, and Jess,

who had already mounted his own horse, went to Granny's assistance with his lariat. When once captured, the mule submitted meekly, and stood with a sleepy look in his eyes while the saddle was being girted on him. Then Granny mounted.

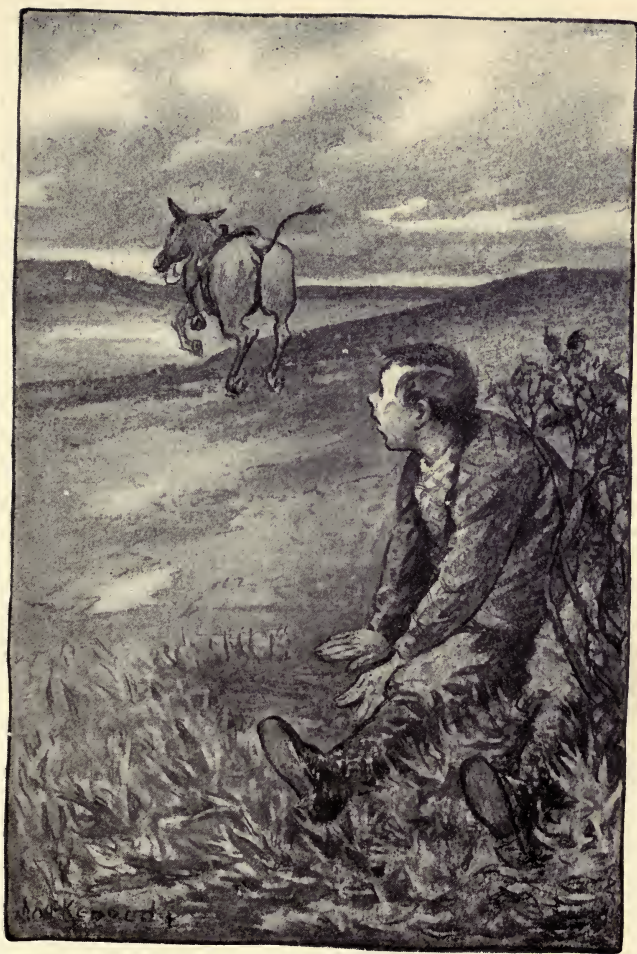
As the more than two hundred pounds of cook settled into the saddle, the mule woke up. With an angry look, as if saying, "You don't expect one mule to carry all that, do you?" he suddenly began to jump and kick. Harder and harder he jumped, and faster and faster he kicked, till presently he was engaged in a most furious bucking.

Everybody was surprised and — cowboys are not very sympathetic — delighted. Shouts and shrieks of laughter rang out while the cook, looking "like a big, fat toad-frog," as Ed Simpson afterwards declared, was clinging to the saddle with the desperation of despair. That he stayed on the mule as long as he did is a matter of surprise; for all the time he was going up and down, up and down, up and down, hitting the saddle like a pile-driver.

Finally the mule gave a most terrific jump, and Granny went through the air and came down in a bunch of brush and briars. The mule trotted away, evidently well pleased with himself.

Slowly Granny disentangled his clothes and crawled out of the thicket. He was not hurt — only scratched a little by the briars. He stood staring after the mule.

"Friskiest brute I ever got astraddle of," he finally remarked, solemnly.



THE MULE TROTTED AWAY EVIDENTLY WELL PLEASED WITH
HIMSELF.

At this everybody laughed again, good-naturedly this time. Jess caught the mule and unsaddled him, and the cook stayed with the wagon. So ended his aspirations toward becoming a cowboy.

The cattle were all getting accustomed to the road, and knew what was expected of them. If a steer broke out of the drove and started off, the moment he discovered that a cowboy was after him he would turn and make for the other cattle as fast as he could run. The whiplash had taught him that.

Owing to the fact that they were traveling a road, the cattle were usually stretched out in a longer, narrower string than they would have been if following a broad trail. Naturally, the best travelers took the lead, either being ahead at the start or forging to the front soon after the drove got under way.

The leader of the leaders was a big red steer with a white face, known as Ball. The most noticeable thing about him was the fact that he had but one horn. Somewhere in his career, and somehow, the other one had been broken off. The horn that remained was big enough for two, however. Indeed, it was so long and so large that Jess often wondered how the steer kept his head balanced with the other one off.

Ball was a fine leader. He usually walked alone, with his nearest followers at his heels. He was not only the best traveler in all the drove, but he had been a work-ox before he joined the Bar-Circle Outfit, and was gentle and easily managed. And he was also sufficiently intelligent to distinguish between the main-

traveled road and a branch road. Jess, who still managed the whole forward end of the drove while on the march, often boasted of his one-horned assistant.

"Jess," remarked Burgess one night, "there's a big, clear-toned ox-bell there in the wagon, that's not being used. Why don't you get it and fasten it on Ball? In any ordinary weather it can be heard at least a mile, and the cattle will soon learn to follow it."

"I'll do that to-morrow morning," answered Jess, jumping at the suggestion. "And then when —"

"I object!" broke in Gregory. "This is no little drove of barnyard cows, being driven home to the milk-pen. This is a high-class outfit of beeves on the trail from Texas to California."

"High-class outfit or what not, it will be a good thing to have that lead-steer belled," declared Burgess. And Jess and Johnson agreed with him.

Gregory and Ed Simpson ridiculed the idea; and Gregory insisted that if they belled the steer they should also hire some farmer's daughter with a strong voice to ride ahead and call the cattle. Their opposition was not serious, however, and the very next morning Jess got the bell and buckled its broad raw-hide collar around Ball's neck.

The big leader of the drove seemed to feel that an honor had been done him — that his leadership had been acknowledged. And Jess could easily imagine that Ball walked with a more majestic stride as he led the long line day after day, his swinging bell sounding

out its clear and not unmusical tones at every step.

Late one afternoon the caravan marched across the Trinity River, and not far beyond passed through a sorry little town that would not always remain so sorry. In fact, though there was nothing to foretoken such a thing now, it would one day become an important city — the chief city of Texas. Its name was Dallas.

The weather was now well-nigh perfect for traveling, and the big drove pushed steadily northward, through a sparsely settled country. The cattle were marching as fast as it was safe to push them; but Burgess, who understood the situation, and was nervously anxious, kept urging everybody on.

"Boys," he said more than once to the party around the camp-fire, "we've got thousands of miles to travel, and only a few months to travel them in. It's absolutely necessary that we get across the Rockies before cold weather. If the winter snows find us there, it means starvation for the cattle, and ruin, hopeless ruin, for us."

CHAPTER VII

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE

ONE of the duties that had to be attended to regularly was counting the cattle. This was done every two or three days at the longest, and oftener if there had been any opportunity for steers to slip out. The counting commonly took place in the morning, soon after the drove got under way.

There were never less than two men to count; and though he disliked the task, Jess was usually one of them. After the drove had got well strung out, he and the other man would station themselves on opposite sides of the road, with their horses so close together that not more than four steers could pass between them abreast. Then, while other drivers guided the cattle through, the two men would count them. And besides their count, Burgess was nearly always sitting on his horse close by, counting also.

If the three counts, or even two of them, were close together — they were seldom exactly together — and the number was not short, nothing more was necessary. But if there were important differences, the counters would gallop to the front and the whole process would be gone over again. Should steers be missing, the drove would either be held or allowed to advance

slowly, till cowboys could go out and round up and drive in the stragglers.

Hard though the life on the trail proved, it was not without its pleasures. Indeed, to one as spirited and full of energy as Jess Holloway was, the very exertion and excitement of meeting the hardships were far from unpleasant. But the most interesting part of each day, the time that all looked forward to, was the nightly gathering around the camp-fire.

The weather was still cool enough to make the warmth agreeable; and as the chill and gloom of night settled down, all except those on herd-duty would assemble around the glowing, crackling logs. Every man of them, armed with a long, forked stick, and provided by the cook with a large-sized slice of beef, would seat himself comfortably in front of the fire and proceed to broil part of his supper.

With a dozen or fifteen broiling-sticks reaching out to the fire, and a dozen or fifteen pieces of beef sizzling and crisping in the heat, the air would soon become charged with appetizing odors, and the spirits of the tired, hungry men would rise accordingly. And from this time on till they fell asleep, the conversation would never flag for a moment.

While their suppers, consisting of broiled beef and the cook's bread and coffee, were being eaten, the men talked by turns or all at once. But afterwards the whole circle would lean back comfortably on their elbows or against their saddles; and while most of them smoked and listened, one of their number would

relate some interesting piece of his own experience. And many were the tales of stirring adventure told around those camp-fires. For nearly all the party had lived adventurous lives.

It was at one of these camp-fires — the first night in the "Nation," as the Indian Territory was called — that Jess heard the story of how the three partners had "struck it rich" in California.

The drove had crossed Red River that afternoon, near Colbert's Ferry. The stream, though slightly swollen, and red enough to deserve its name, had not been swimming. After crossing over from Texas into the Indian Territory, the caravan had moved out to the open country. The cattle were now under herd on the prairie, but the camp was in the edge of some woods. An unusually large fire was burning.

Naturally the whole party were interested in California, and the conversation had drifted around to gold-digging. Phil Gregory was talking.

"All three of us, Burgess, Johnson and I, went out to California in '49," he said. "Gold was first discovered at Marshall's Mill in '48, you remember, while a ditch was being dug for a mill-race. But the discovery failed to get abroad for some time, and the rush didn't set in till the following year. And what a rush that was!

"We three got acquainted on the road. Burgess and Johnson both had some money when they arrived at the diggings, I believe. But I was recently out of school, and it had taken all I could rake and scrape

together to pay my expenses from Missouri to California. I wasn't long, though, in striking pay-dirt — dirt that would pan out several dollars a day in gold. But with flour at seventy-five dollars a hundred, eggs a dollar apiece and butter five or six dollars a pound, it cost several dollars a day to live."

"Yes. And such appetites as we did have!" put in Burgess. "While we were working there on the middle fork of American River, I doubt if there was a day when I couldn't have eaten seventy-five or a hundred dollars' worth of provisions if I could have afforded to."

"I haven't a suspicion as to how much it would have taken to satisfy my appetite," laughed Gregory. "I ate all I cared to pay for, then stopped. What I did eat seemed to stimulate my hunger rather than satisfy it. I was as ravenous as a wolf all the time. But in spite of my hunger I managed to save up a little dust."

"As soon as I got enough ahead to buy some provisions and other things, I formed a partnership with Jeddy Johnson there, and we struck off across the country prospecting. We stayed out as long as there was anything to eat; but finally we had to go back to the diggings and work there again."

"But that didn't suit me. As soon as I could accumulate some more dust, I formed another partnership, with Burgess this time, and we spent several weeks wandering over the hills. That was a failure, too. We came back poorer than we started out."

"Well, next time Burgess and Johnson and I all

went out together. We didn't make much. After that I wanted to try some new diggings, and I got a new partner, a young fellow named Boone Adams. It was Miss Sally Adams's brother, Jess."

"Yes, she told me you and her brother were together for a while," replied the cowboy.

"Boone and I were partners for a year and a half," Gregory went on. "We took several prospecting trips together, but we didn't run across anything worth mentioning. At last he wanted to go one way and I another, and so we parted.

"After that I wandered about the country for a year and more, chasing luck from one mining camp to another. Whenever I heard of new diggings opened, I made for them as fast as I could travel.

"At last I trudged into a new mining camp, near Table Mountain, and found Joe Burgess and Jeddy Johnson there. They'd been separated for a while, but they'd got back together and were partners again. Like myself, they hadn't made anything but a bare living. But they were working like beavers."

"We had to work like beavers to make enough to exist on," spoke up Johnson, from the other side of the fire.

"Yes, it was hustle or starve there," laughed Burgess.

"Well, I'd struck a streak of luck when I found my old partners," said Gregory. "The buckskin bag I kept my dust in — my gold dust, you know — was entirely empty; and I was worn out and discouraged.

The first day I went to digging there I had a strange feeling, and a day or two later I went down with the fever. And on my back I stayed for six long weeks.

"If it hadn't been for Joe and Jeddy, I should have died, I guess; though all the miners were kind enough to me. Several that were down with the fever at the same time did die.

"The fever itself wasn't my worst trouble, it seems to me now. I was fearfully, frightfully homesick — something I had never been while I was on my feet. As I lay there in the tent, gazing out at those bare, dreary hills, I longed with an unutterable longing for old Missouri. I felt that I would rather die and be buried there in Callaway County, my birthplace, than to live and live in luxury in California. And even after I got up and was able to walk about, I'd have started home at once if I had been strong enough to travel, and had had money enough to pay my way. But not a cent did I have, even for my urgent necessities. In fact, until I was able to swing a pick, Joe and Jeddy had to feed me. And I'm afraid they themselves went hungry sometimes to do it."

"There's no denying that you had a marvelous appetite just about that time, Phil," remarked Burgess. "It took all the dust Jeddy and I could wash out to keep the three of us in something to eat. But you paid it all back later."

"After my strength began to return, I recovered from my homesickness," continued Gregory. "And soon the lust of gold was upon me again. I deter-

mined not to go home empty-handed. We three were eager to set out on another prospecting trip; but we didn't have anything to buy provisions with, till one of us dug into a little pocket in the rock and took out a few hundred dollars. Then we — ”

“It was Phil that struck the pocket,” spoke up Johnson. “We all shared what he took out of it, though.”

“After what had been going on for weeks, while I was sick and convalescent, it would have been very strange if you two hadn't shared my little find with me, Jeddy. And it was a lucky find for all of us, as it happened. We bought what flour and bacon we could carry, then made up our packs and started out on another prospecting tour.

“Well, we wandered over the country for weeks. In several places we found the color of gold, but not enough to pay us. Finally our provisions gave out. But we had a good rifle, and for a week or two we lived altogether on game. While two of us worked, the third would be out hunting. As we were now in an unfrequented part of the country, it was not hard to keep ourselves supplied with meat. But by and by we got hungry for bread, and then we started back to the diggings.

“On the second morning after starting, we came to a little creek, and couldn't resist the temptation to stop and use our pans. We worked up and down the creek till noon, but hadn't washed out gold enough to encourage us. So we concluded to go on. But we

camped there for dinner; and after dinner, being tired and discouraged — it seemed so little worth while to work — we lay down for a nap.

“As it happened, I awoke before the others. I felt better after sleeping, and as I didn’t care to wake Jeddy and Joe, I decided to do a little more prospecting while they were napping. So I followed up the stream. Before I had gone more than two hundred yards, something yellow caught my eye.

“No starving hawk ever pounced upon a quail more eagerly than I pounced upon that piece of yellow metal. It was what I had been looking for and longing to see for four years. I had found a nugget as big as a hen’s egg — of pure gold.

“There were other nuggets lying there in plain view, not so large as the first one, but lovely to look at. During the next few minutes I collected more than a thousand dollars’ worth of the yellow stuff.

“When I had picked up all that was in sight, I started back to the camp with it. And I ran every step of the way — ran from sheer eagerness. Joe and Jeddy were still asleep — sleeping the sleep of weariness and discouragement. I woke them by putting the cold, wet nuggets against their faces. You ought to have seen them stare when they did wake and sit up.

“Well, the long and short of it was that we stayed there nearly two months, busy with picks and pans, digging and washing gold out of that creek. At the end of that time we had a hundred and seventy-seven

pounds of the yellow metal between us — a little more than thirty-five thousand dollars.”

Various remarks and comments were offered at the conclusion of Gregory's narrative, and numerous questions were asked. Finally Burgess spoke:

“You don't want to get the delusion that mining gold is an easy way to make money. The fact of the matter is, all three of us had earned every cent we washed out of that stream, even before we made our strike. I've always insisted that every dollar taken out of California mines has cost somebody two dollars. A few people rake in the prizes, and nine out of ten, if not ninety-nine out of a hundred, never get back the money they've spent, much less pay for their time and labor and hardships. And besides that, many of them go home with broken health, or some other serious injury. For instance, I've got this, and this.” He laid his hand on his left leg, the one he limped with, and then touched his scarred neck.

“How did those come, Mr. Burgess?” inquired Jess. He had often wondered about that scar.

“I went hunting for a grizzly bear, Jess — and found him,” replied the '49-er, smiling grimly. “The miracle of it is that I live to tell it.”

Half a dozen exclamations followed this statement, and as many curious men began to question him. But before Burgess could reply, a loud trampling came from the prairie. All sprang up, thinking that a stampede had begun. The cattle had leaped to their feet and made a rush, but had stopped as suddenly as they

started, after moving about twenty yards. There was no further trouble. But by the time the excitement had subsided, the circle around the camp-fire had broken up for the night, and the story of Burgess's encounter with the grizzly was not told.

Nor was it told for a good many nights afterward. For on the following day occurred the first tragedy of the trip — a tragedy that would cost the Bar-Circle Outfit their most expert cowboy.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLUE HORSE AND HIS RIDER

WHEN Ed Simpson had first presented himself to the three Californians and asked for employment, Burgess had inquired:

“Are you a good rider?”

“I ride anything that can wear a saddle,” was the unhesitating reply.

“We’re finding it hard to get as many broken cowponies as we shall need for the trip; that is, at reasonable prices,” Burgess explained. “We’re offered a bunch of horses fresh from the range, at a bargain. They’re good-looking animals — above the average, most of them. But several in the bunch have never had a saddle on. In case we buy those, we shall need at least one hand that can ride any horse, no matter how wild. If you can do that, we’ll pay you extra wages for it.”

“Guess I’m the chap you’re looking for,” replied the weather-bronzed cowboy. “If I don’t ride any horse you bring me to ride, big or little, young or old, wild or gentle, there’ll be nothing coming to me. No ride, no pay.”

So an arrangement was reached, and Ed was hired with the understanding that he should break their unbroken horses. By the time the drove had crossed

Red River, he had tamed all the wild ones but three. Two of those had been broken by Jess; the third nobody had yet mounted.

This last was a good-sized, vicious-looking animal, of a rather unusual color — a distinctly bluish cast. Twice Ed had roped him, and twice Ed and others had attempted to put a saddle on him. But so furiously, savagely had the beast struggled and fought that they had let him go.

"Never mind, my fine fellow! Your day will come! I'll show you who's boss of this outfit!" Ed exclaimed, as the released mustang, kicking up his heels contemptuously, galloped back to the other horses.

That was in Texas. On their first morning in the "Nation," the cook informed Burgess that their supply of meat was running short. So it was decided to kill a beef. The weather was now rather warm, and as there was no time to dry the meat in the sun, the only way to keep it from spoiling was to barbecue it — half cook it and half dry it, over a slow fire. To do this they would have to remain in camp half a day.

While the hands were getting ready to butcher a steer, Ed Simpson remarked:

"You boys don't need me here. If some of you will help me ketch 'im and get a saddle on 'im, believe I'll ride that blue horse, just to show 'im what's what."

"Good idea, Ed," spoke up Burgess. "Break him if you can; and if you can't we'll get rid of him somehow. We don't want to be bothered with any useless stock."

"Oh, I'll ride 'im if his hide stays on!" declared the cowboy, with a look of grim determination.

The blue horse was soon roped and thrown. While others held him down, Ed and Jess girted a saddle on him, then bridled him. After being blindfolded, the animal was allowed to get upon his feet. Now Ed sprang into the saddle. At the same time the blind was removed, and the men ran back out of the way.

They expected some furious bucking; but what followed astonished even these cowboys, familiar though they were with wild horses.

The blue mustang actually bawled in his rage, as he used every possible endeavor to get rid of the burden on his back. He bucked and bucked, then reared and plunged and kicked and fought, and even tried to bite his rider's legs. Later he seemed about to throw himself down to roll. The goading spurs prevented this, and he made a sudden dash for some timber, intending to drag the cowboy off by running through the brush. But Ed steered him away from the timber and out into the prairie. They finally disappeared over a rise. When last seen the horse was still bucking, with unabated fury.

"Ed will conquer him — never fear about that," Gregory remarked to the party. "There's a rider," he added, admiringly.

"That's what he is," agreed Johnson. "If he hadn't been one of the best riders alive, he couldn't have stayed on that brute two minutes."

"I'd rather it was Ed than I on the blue demon," re-



HE BUCKED AND BUCKED.

marked Burgess. "Do you think you could stay with him, Jess?"

The young cowboy looked a little doubtful. "I'm glad it's not my job," he admitted. "Still, if it was, I'd stick as long as I could. I'd give the blue fellow the hardest fight possible."

"Well, you can all get on that kind of brutes that want to," said Johnson. "But as for me, I'd as soon try to saddle and ride Satan himself."

The party now turned their attention to the business in hand. After cutting a three-year-old steer out of the herd, and driving him down to camp, they shot him and skinned him. Then, while some made a framework of forks and poles, others cut the meat into slices or strips, thrust sticks through them, and laid the sticks on the framework. Now fires were kindled under the meat, hot enough to cook it slowly, without burning it.

The meat had to be closely watched all the time. When the first lot had been sufficiently cooked, it was removed and another lot hung over the fire. And so on till the whole beef was rudely barbecued. It was all more or less smoked; but little would a hungry cowboy care for such a trifle as that.

The task of barbecuing the beef occupied the whole forenoon. After it had been going on for an hour or so, one of the cowboys had occasion to walk up to the top of the rise, near by. On coming back, he remarked to the barbecuers:

"Well, the blue is still at it, as hard as ever."

"And Ed — is he still on top?" inquired Burgess.

"Ed is still on top."

"And will be till this time next week, I guess, if he can't conquer the brute sooner," spoke up Gregory.

"He's savage on a horse, but he can ride."

Having confidence that the cowboy could take care of himself, they went on with their cooking and thought little more about him. But just as their task was finished, one of the herders came down from the prairie.

"Do you know, boys, that mustang's still busy? I've always been used to mean horses, but I never saw one that could match that blue."

Jess caught up his bridle. "I'm going to see about that," he said. "It's hard enough on a fellow to straddle a pitching horse fifteen or twenty minutes at a stretch. But Ed has been on that brute four hours. An iron man couldn't stand that."

"Ed seems to be standing it all right. He's still in the saddle," spoke up the herder.

But Jess and Phil Gregory got their horses, which were staked near by, saddled and mounted them, and galloped away over the rise. A few minutes later Gregory returned, riding faster than he had gone.

"Boys, we've got to make a litter as quick as we can," he said, springing to the ground. "Ed's badly hurt."

"Did the blue pitch him off?" somebody called out.

"No. When Jess and I got there, Ed was still in

the saddle. We didn't notice anything wrong till we rode close, and then we discovered that he was as pale as a ghost, and that blood was running out of his mouth."

"Why, what in the world was the matter?" demanded Burgess.

"He's injured internally, Joe," answered Gregory. "That awful jerking and jolting for four hours was too much, even for Ed Simpson. Half of it would have been too much for anybody else. He says he felt all right till a few minutes ago; and then something seemed to give way inside of him. After that he was afraid to attempt to dismount, and he couldn't get the horse back to camp. So all he could do was to stay in the saddle. I'm glad we went over when we did. The blue was still bucking away as best he could; but he had used himself up, and it didn't amount to much. He almost reeled after we got Ed and the saddle off, and turned him loose."

"Will Ed have to be carried in?" asked Johnson.

"Oh yes, Jeddy. He's scarcely able to stand, much less walk. The fellow's badly hurt. I can tell you that."

A rude litter was hastily put together, and then the whole party, except Burgess and Granny, set off on foot to carry in the injured cowboy. They soon returned.

Ed, looking very pale, lay with his eyes shut while they were bringing him into camp. But he opened them when they lifted him from the litter to a bed of

blankets. Burgess, plainly much worried, bent over the cowboy and felt his pulse.

"Oh Ed, Ed, why did you stay on that savage beast so long? Why didn't you jump off and let him go?"

The cowboy's tones were very faint, scarcely recognizable, as he replied:

"I couldn't have got my saddle off without — without —"

"Then why didn't you put a bullet through his head? That's what I'd have done, in your place. We've got no use for such animals as that, anyhow."

"Well, Mr. Burgess, I told you I'd ride any horse you wanted rode. And I — I — I did." He closed his eyes wearily, but opened them again. "He didn't get me off. The boys will tell you that."

"No, I know he didn't, Ed. But I wish you hadn't done it. I wanted you to ride horses, not a fiend in the shape of a horse. How do you feel?"

"I'm not in any particular pain, but I'm mighty weak — weak and tired, Mr. Burgess." He closed his eyes again.

The partners now walked aside and held a consultation. All agreed that Ed was dangerously hurt. They decided to send back to Texas for a doctor. Jess volunteered to make the ride. But when the matter was mentioned to Ed, he suggested something else.

"Chances are that this will wind me up," he said. "But even if I get well, it'll not be in time to go with you to California. That's out of the question now. I've got a cousin over there in Texas, close to Sherman.

The best thing you can do is to get me back there somehow, and leave me. My cousin and his family will take care of me all right. And you boys have got no time to fool away with me here."

"We can take time," declared Burgess.

"No, that won't do. You don't dare. If you stayed here till I got well, not a hoof of the Bar-Circle drove would ever reach California."

After discussing the matter again, the partners reluctantly decided that what Ed had proposed was the best thing to do under the circumstances. So Gregory mounted his horse and set out for a cabin they had passed, a mile back. He soon returned.

"I found a Choctaw living there," he reported. "By good luck he had a wagon and an ox-team, and I hired him to haul Ed to Sherman. He was yoking up when I rode away."

When at length the Indian came, he had only an empty wagon. The men fell to work with hands or knives, and soon had grass enough pulled or cut to fill the wagon-bed. On this the injured cowboy was laid. Then all the party crowded around to tell him good-bye.

"I wish I could have gone with you, boys," Ed roused himself to say. "It'll be a great trip; but it's not for me. I hope you'll get through — I hope you'll get through safe. But — I don't know."

The Choctaw drove away. Jess was riding on one side of the wagon and Gregory on the other. The rest of the party now began to saddle their horses;

for Burgess announced that the drove would move on a few miles.

It had been dark an hour when the ox-wagon arrived at its destination, just beyond the little town of Sherman, and Ed Simpson was turned over to the care of his relatives. A doctor had been summoned, as they passed through the town. Ed seemed none the worse for his ride.

Gregory paid him all the money that was due him, and more. Then they bade him good-bye.

"We'll shoot that mustang when we overtake the drove, Ed," Gregory remarked.

"No, no, Phil, don't do it — don't do anything of the kind," the cowboy hastened to say. "I've been used to wild horses all my life, but I never saw one make as hard a fight as the blue did. I had every advantage in the world, and yet he beat me bad enough. No saddle-slavery for him. He was half dead himself when you boys took me off his back; but he wasn't any nearer conquered than when I climbed on 'im. If you don't want 'im, cut 'im out and let 'im go. He's earned his freedom — more than earned it. But it was a fool's job for me — a fool's job."

"Be sure to write to some of us when you get better, Ed," said Jess. "We expect to be at Fort Gibson a week or two, you know."

"Yes, I'll write as soon as I'm able, Jess," Ed replied, almost cheerfully.

But Gregory and Jess rode back to town with the doctor, and he assured them that it would be little less

than a miracle if the injured man lived more than a day or two.

The two men rode hard, but it was far along in the night when they reached the Bar-Circle camp — a new camp. And rain began to fall while they were unsaddling.

It may be explained here that no word ever came from Ed Simpson; and Jess never learned whether his friend lived or died. However, there is every reason to believe that his injuries proved fatal.

The blue horse was left with the herd. No other attempt was made to tame him. But he was never the same animal again. Every day he grew thinner. One morning, two weeks later, while the Bar-Circle Outfit was camped near the Arkansas River, they found him dead.

There had been a duel between the unconquerable horse and the unyielding cowboy, and they had done each other to death. Or, more correctly, perhaps, the blue mustang, rather than become a slave, had killed both his rider and himself. It was one of the tragedies of the cattle-trail.

The loss of their best hand proved a severe blow to the whole Bar-Circle Outfit, filling the camp with gloom, and throwing more hard work upon those who remained. And upon nobody did more of the heavy work fall than upon Jess Holloway; for none of them could stand more of it — or as much of it.

Until now the weather had been dry. But the rain that began to fall as Gregory and Jess rode into camp,

on their return from Sherman, proved to be the beginning of a rainy season. And such a season! From here on to the Arkansas River it would be splash, splash, splash! When not wading, the caravan would be swimming.

CHAPTER IX

THROUGH STORMS AND FLOODS

ON the second night following Ed Simpson's misfortune, all the Bar-Circle Outfit passed through the most unpleasant experience of the journey, up till now.

There had been two hours of slow rain in the morning, and threatenings of rain all the afternoon; but by night the sky was almost clear. For once Jess was very sleepy. He had slept scarcely at all the night before. No sooner was supper over than he hunted up his blankets, crawled under the wagon, and a minute or two later was in the land of dreams.

Not till after midnight did he return to consciousness. Usually he woke at a touch, but now he had to be shaken vigorously. Burgess was saying:

"Wake up, Jess! Wake up! wake up! Saddle your horse as soon as you can."

"What — what's the matter now?" asked the drowsy cowboy, sitting up so suddenly, while still half asleep, that he bumped his head against the coupling-pole.

"I'm sorry to call you out to-night, Jess. I know how sleepy and tired you must be. But there's a fearful storm brewing, and all hands will be needed to hold the cattle."

"I'll be with you," answered Jess, groping for his

clothes. He crawled out from under the wagon to dress.

There was a foreboding stillness in the air, he noticed, and a frightfully black cloud hung in the west. Dazzling, blinding flashes of lightning gleamed from the storm-cloud every now and then. Sometimes the air trembled with the rumbling and rolling of distant thunder.

All the other hands were up, and most of them were mounted. Jess seized his saddle and hurried to his horse, staked not far away for just such emergencies as this. He was soon galloping toward the herd.

The cowboys scarcely had time to reach the cattle and take their stations, when the storm burst upon them in its fury. And such a storm as followed Jess had seldom seen and never before been out in.

Some of the men had their blankets fastened around their shoulders as a protection. But others, Jess among them, wore only their ordinary clothes. All they could do was to pull down their hat-brims, turn their backs to the storm and take it. And soon there was not a dry thread on any of them.

For two hours the rain poured down in torrents, till the whole prairie seemed afloat. The lightnings gleamed blindingly, and the thunders crashed and boomed and rolled. And through it all the wind roared and raged, whirling and dashing in such frightful gusts that at times it threatened to tear the riders out of their saddles.

No sooner did the storm swoop down upon them

than the cattle began to drift before it. And they kept drifting till it had passed over. The herders moved with them. More than once, when the electric explosions rent the air, the whole herd made a forward rush, as if starting on a stampede. But they never ran far. All through the storm, even when it was hardest, some of the men kept up a cheerful kind of shouting and others sang, to quiet their frightened charges. Every lightning-flash showed the steers crowded together, with all heads pointing in the same direction.

By the time the storm had passed on, the herd had drifted at least two miles. The night was now pitch-dark, and all the men were soaked and chilled and miserable; but not one of them attempted to make his way back to camp. They sat in their wet saddles and waited for daylight.

When at last morning dawned, they rounded up the grazing steers and drove them toward the road. At the same time Gregory started back to the wagon, to let Burgess know that everything was safe, and to have the camp moved up to the cattle. The steers were counted this morning, but none had got away.

That was their first and perhaps their worst storm, but by no means their last. Indeed, during the two weeks and more between Red River and the Arkansas, they must have passed through not less than half a dozen similar storms, besides showers and less violent rains too numerous to keep count of.

On the day after the big storm, Burgess hired another man, on trial. The new hand had spent several

years in the United States army. Soon everybody was calling him the old soldier, not because he was old — he was under forty; but because he had performed so many deeds of valor while in the army — he related them himself, around the camp-fire — that it was soon agreed that he must have seen not less than fifty years of service. He was a fluent talker, and never failed to make himself the hero of his own stories. Indeed, times without number he had saved a large part of the United States army from utter destruction by his courage and presence of mind.

"What was your rank?" Gregory inquired one night.

"I was a private."

"A private! Why, a soldier that has done all that you've done for your country ought to be at least a major-general."

"I would have been a general if I'd had a chance. But them West P'int fellers, they see to it that nobody but theirselves don't git a chance to raise," replied the unabashed soldier.

"Too bad!" answered Gregory. "Boys, just to show what we think of the conduct of those West Pointers, I suggest that we promote this man to the rank he has so well earned. All in favor of this will hereafter address him as General."

The suggestion was promptly adopted, and the soldier that had been only a private in the army promptly became a general among the cowboys.

But he received this title with such evidences of sat-

isfaction that some of the hands looked about for one a little less flattering. The man himself gave them a cue when he let it be known that he had deserted from the army. From this time on, though addressed as General, he was commonly spoken of as the Deserter. And it is by one or the other of these titles that he will be known in this story; for his name has been lost among the years that have since come and gone.

A night or two after the new man had been engaged, Burgess called Jess aside.

"I wish you'd take the General out and put him through to-night."

"I'll do it," was the cheerful reply. And Jess and the Deserter rode out to patrol the herd.

During the first two or three hours the new man made his rounds quietly, stopping sometimes when they met to tell Jess some of his marvelous exploits in the army. But at length he began to grow sleepy and impatient.

"When do you reckon they'll relieve us?" he demanded.

"No telling," replied Jess. "Burgess ordered us to stay out till he sent somebody to take our places, you recollect. He'll let us know when he wants us to come in. Our business is to obey orders. You must have learned that in the army."

The Deserter grumbled and swore a little, and rode on. But he grumbled more and more loudly every time they met. Finally, after a few rounds more, Jess failed to meet him.

"What's gone with the fellow?" he asked himself. "He must have deserted again."

But soon he discovered a riderless horse grazing at the edge of the herd. Approaching, he learned that the Deserter had dismounted and, finding the grass wet with dew, had driven up a steer and was now lying in the animal's dry place, sound asleep.

Jess was both amused and disgusted. Getting down, he punched the sleeper vigorously with his foot.

"Are you crazy, man? Get up from here! Get up, I tell you!"

The General roused enough to grumble and swear. At last he sat up. "Why don't you let a feller have a little nap?" he growled.

"If you do much napping here, you stand a good chance to wake up on the other side of Jordan. I wouldn't go to sleep where you are for all the gold in California. Why, if these cattle had stampeded, there wouldn't have been enough of you left to hold a funeral over."

The fellow grumbled and swore, but finally mounted his horse again.

Fearing that the Deserter might do something else equally foolish, Jess rode to camp and reported the matter to Burgess. Soos, the Mexican, and another man were promptly sent to the herd, and the former soldier was permitted to come in and go to bed. The Deserter had been tested and found wanting.

But in spite of his failure he was not discharged. They were in need of hands at present; and Burgess

hoped to use him as a teamster after they had outfitted at Fort Gibson.

Rain was now falling every day, and often two or three times a day. The marching of the drove was a continuous splashing, through mud and water. Ravines and hollows ordinarily dry were torrents after those heavy downpours. The creeks were swollen to rivers, and the rivers were either bank-full or out of their banks. The torrents would soon run down till they could be forded, and the rivers had flatboats to ferry the wagon across. But with the middle-sized streams, those that in dry weather would be easily fordable, there was no end of trouble.

The first of these encountered was a large creek, or small river, known as the South Boggy. The Bar-Circle Outfit arrived there soon after beginning an afternoon drive, and found it level with its banks, very swift, and thirty to forty yards wide.

The steers swam it easily, and so did the loose horses, and the drivers, on horseback. But how to get the wagon across without waiting for the stream to run down was a question. For there was neither ferry-boat nor bridge.

As it happened, some of the partly discovered three Indian canoes — logs hollowed out — tied to trees not far above the ford. These would answer the purpose.

A few of the drivers remained on the far side, to hold the cattle. But most of them swam their horses back, to help with the wagon. While some cut poles and tied them across the three canoes, to fasten them

together, but a few feet apart, others took out the oxen, unyoked them and made them swim the stream. Then the wagon-sheet and bows were taken off, the wagon unloaded, and the wagon-bed lifted from the running-gear and set on the three canoes. A strong rope was now stretched across the stream, to keep their craft from being swept away, and soon a rude ferry was running.

There were two ferrymen in the wagon-bed, and but a few hundred pounds of freight could be sent across at a time. So several trips must be made. The running-gear of the wagon had to be taken to pieces.

When everything had been ferried to the north bank, the cowboys swam across. Now the wagon was put together and loaded again, and the oxen yoked and hooked to it. Then the outfit moved on.

But after marching about half a mile, they came to another stream, not quite so large as the one just passed, but equally troublesome to cross.

The General and another hand, Dick McCarty by name, were now sent over in advance to hold the cattle, the rest of the drivers remaining on the south side to help get the wagon over. There were no canoes here, and the three used before had to be dragged from one stream to the other, through thick woods, with the oxen. Then the whole process of ferrying the wagon and its load across had to be gone through again.

By the time it was finished and the outfit was ready to move on, night was at hand. But when the drivers

rode out to put the cattle in motion, they made a startling discovery.

The two men sent across to hold the herd had about three hundred of them rounded up. The other twenty-two hundred had disappeared — vanished like magic.

The whole country, low bottom land, was covered with a dense forest, through which it was impossible to see many yards; and, unknown to the two herders, the lost steers, becoming restless, had scattered and slipped away. Most of them had probably been gone for hours. Where or how far away they were by this time nobody could even guess.

CHAPTER X

FORT GIBSON AND THE ARKANSAS

It was a serious situation, especially for the three partners. Cattle that had cost twenty thousand dollars, and would be worth several times that sum in California, were scattering over the country at will, wandering nobody knew where. Night was coming on, with indications of rain. Much of the timber here was the thorny bois-d'arc, or Osage orange, very troublesome to ride through, even in daylight. Nothing could be done till morning.

Both the Deserter and Dick McCarty, who had allowed the cattle to escape, were hands of little experience. They had rounded up the whole drove, they declared, and being unable to see many yards through the leafy forest, had supposed they were holding all.

The three owners took their loss very differently. Gregory was cheerful, having no doubt the missing steers could easily be found and driven back next morning. Johnson, on the other hand, was as angry as a man could well be, and did not hesitate to express his feelings. Burgess, though evidently much worried, admitted that he ought to have sent more hands across. The cattle had been held here for hours, and having nothing to browse on but leaves, they had naturally become very restless.

The only thing that could be done just now was to wait. So the little remnant of the herd, followed by the wagon, was driven out to the edge of the prairie. There the party went into camp.

It was an anxious night for everybody, and especially for Burgess, who was too nervous and restless to sleep. Long before day every man of them was up and had eaten his breakfast. There had been some rain during the night, but the sky was now clear. As soon as there was light enough to see a steer, the men started out, in parties of three or four. Even Davis, the wagon-driver, and Granny, the fat cook, were mounted and sent out. But two men remained to look after the cattle and the loose horses, and Burgess was one of those.

An hour or two later the first bunch of steers was brought in — about thirty of them. And so they kept coming during the day, in bunches of twenty to fifty. Not a man stopped for dinner. Indeed, no halt of any kind was made save to shift a saddle from a tired horse to a fresh one. But when night put an end to the search, only about three hundred and fifty head of the lost beeves had been recovered. A sorry showing, certainly, for such a big day's work.

"Too slow — too slow — too slow!" declared Burgess, as he paced nervously back and forth by the camp-fire that night. "By the time we get half of them rounded up, the other half will be scattered from the Arkansas to the Brazos."

"Then let's offer a reward," proposed Johnson.

"A reward's the thing! A reward will rake 'em in!" cried Gregory.

So, as the men rode through the country next day in search of lost cattle, word was left at every cabin that half a dollar a head would be paid for all steers wearing the bar-circle, delivered at the camp.

Results followed promptly. Long before night cattle began to pour in upon the herders. By the second night Burgess's saddle-bags were six hundred dollars lighter, and the drove was swelling toward its original proportions. Numbers of Choctaws — this was the land of the Choctaw Indians — delighted at this easy way of coining gold, were scouring the country near and far. Steers came in more slowly later, and a few of them were never found.

When at length the caravan marched on again, eight or nine hundred dollars in gold had been paid to the Indians, twenty-odd steers were missing, and a week of precious time had been lost.

"But we're wiser — oh, ever so much wiser!" declared Gregory.

During the stop in the Boggy Creek country, two new hands had been employed. One of them, Sam Patterson, was a half-breed, the son of a white father and a Choctaw mother. He had a fair education, and spoke good English. The other man was a cousin of Sam's, but a full-blood Choctaw. He was tall and very dark, with high cheek-bones, and with raven-black hair hanging to his shoulders — a very striking-looking Indian. He understood but little English, and spoke

less. For a day or two he was called by his Choctaw name, and after that by the same name translated — Hawk Tail.

With most of the cattle recovered, and with the two new hands, the caravan pushed northward again. Rain was still falling nearly every day. Every stream was swimming. Both the North and the South Canadians were out of their banks. Several times the wagon had to be taken to pieces and ferried over on rudely constructed rafts.

At times it seemed to rain every night, and the drowsy hands had to snatch what sleep they could in daylight, while the cattle were resting and grazing. Every man's endurance was tried to the utmost. Several fell sick at different times, from exposure or exhaustion, and had to be hauled in the wagon. But the wiry, tireless Jess Holloway went through it all and outrode them all, and never so much as stopped joking. By sheer hardiness and endurance he had taken Ed Simpson's place as the leader of the drivers. Older and more experienced hands, acknowledging themselves unable to keep up with him, much less set the pace for him, had willingly stood aside.

Burgess, with the Rockies and the snows of winter always in his mind's eye, urged everybody on relentlessly. No day's march was ever quite long enough for him. And the cheerful, perpetually good-natured Jess was his delight. All the other hands, and even the two partners, grumbled and growled at times, but Jess was always ready to get up and go, and usually he

was eager to go. Called out of his blankets at midnight to guard the cattle through an approaching storm, he shouted:

“The more rain the more splash, boys! Get wet while you can! It’ll be dry enough when we strike the high plains, in July and August!” And he hurried to saddle his horse.

One morning after an early breakfast, Burgess and Jess rode out to relieve the herders, Burgess with those saddle-bags behind him. There had been some rain during the night, and the cattle had drifted a mile or more from the camp. Not long after the relieved herders had gone, Burgess noticed several steers in the distance and called attention to them.

“It’s possible that some of ours have slipped away. Wouldn’t it be well for you to ride over there and investigate?”

Jess went, but found no steers wearing the bar-circle. He had barely started back when the roar of flying hoofs reached his ears. The whole drove had set off as fast as they could clatter. What had frightened them was never known, but it was a veritable stampede — a daylight stampede.

Away the big drove thundered, at a speed inspired by terror. There was no scattering; all ran together, the drove following their leaders like sheep. Burgess was riding after them on his big horse; but the horse was rather clumsy, and those heavy saddle-bags were flopping up and down.

Jess, though far behind, was quickly in pursuit.

Seeing a long, hard race ahead of him, he urged his horse only to a speed that could be kept up for miles.

At length he passed Burgess, and later he drew alongside the fleeing herd. But it would have been as easy to stop a tornado as to stop those fear-maddened brutes. Away they all went, up and down hills, across gullies and ravines, at headlong, breakneck speed! Jess kept calling to them, but the roar of hoofs and the bellowing drowned his voice.

At last, after the whole drove had run five or six miles, and partially exhausted themselves, Jess spurred in ahead of the leaders. Even then it seemed impossible to do anything with them, so panic-stricken were they. But by firing his six-shooter in front of their noses, he succeeded in turning them. By this time the drove had got well strung out, the fastest animals in the lead and the slowest in the rear. Jess kept the leaders turning till they were running in a circle, and the head of the line was winding itself around the tail. In a very short time he had them tied up in a big knot. Those on the outside were running round and round, and those on the inside were jammed together like sardines in a box, till they could scarcely move. And there they stayed.

Burgess had fallen behind, but he soon caught up.

"Well done, Jess! And this was the first stampede you ever saw, wasn't it?"

"Yes, the very first. I'd heard that cattle could be tied up like this, and I'd made up my mind to try it if I ever had a chance. It worked all right."

"It certainly did. Ed couldn't have managed the thing better. I couldn't have done anything myself, especially with these saddle-bags pounding my horse and threatening to burst themselves. Now, let's see. One of us will have to go back for the boys. I'll go. You can manage the cattle better than I can."

"The boys may have heard," said Jess. "The cattle certainly made noise enough. And old Ball's bell kept up a frightful ringing all the way."

"Yes, they may have heard, or they may not. I'll go back, to make sure. Here, you keep these saddle-bags. I can't half ride with the things."

Jess received those bags of gold and laid them across the back part of his saddle. Burgess galloped away.

This was a mark of confidence — a mark that probably would not have been given before the stampede. Burgess sometimes left his treasure-bags with one or the other of his partners for a short while, but never before had they been entrusted to one of the hired hands. They were never even left in the wagon.

Half an hour later Burgess returned, a number of men with him. He had met them on the way. Jess still had the cattle pretty well knotted together; for he had kept riding around them. The drove was now got in motion. When it was at the road again, the morning drive began.

Jess soon discovered that he had risen suddenly in the estimation of his employers. Heretofore they had trusted him because of his willingness and his marvel-

ous endurance, but had distrusted him more or less because of his inexperience. But his stopping the drove unaided had proved that he could meet emergencies, however unexpected. From this time on he was called into the councils of the three partners whenever he was present; and no important step was taken in the management of the cattle without asking his advice.

This added responsibility had a good effect upon the young cowboy. Up to this time his chief interest in the cattle had been the pay that he was to receive; though, with his superabundance of energy, the excitement and the perpetual activity made him love the work. But now, as the most trusted of the drivers, he began to feel that part of the responsibility of getting these steers through to California rested upon him. And he naturally found himself looking forward to foresee difficulties, and planning ways to get round them, in advance.

One day, after the caravan had passed from the country of the Choctaws into the country of the Creeks, Hawk Tail, the Choctaw driver, made the acquaintance of a Creek horseman traveling in the same direction. They rode along together, by the cattle, well up toward the head of the line, and for a time seemed the best of friends. Later Jess heard them quarreling, loudly and angrily. Sam Patterson, the half-breed, told him that they were quarreling over the prowess of their respective ancestors.

Soon afterwards those at the rear end of the line were startled to see two horsemen come tearing by.

In the lead was the Creek, lashing his horse frantically, and riding for life; while close behind came Hawk Tail, reaching for the Creek with a murderous-looking knife!

They passed the wagon like a flash, and quickly disappeared to the rear. After a few minutes the Choc-taw returned.

"Well, Hawk Tail, did you catch him?" inquired Gregory.

"No ketchee. Creek run heap fast. Heap big afraid!" replied the Indian, with a sour grin, as he passed on to his place up the line. There was plenty of savagery left in Hawk Tail, if he did wear the white man's dress.

At last, just as the sun was setting one day, the long procession, while marching across a prairie country, came in sight of the timber skirting the Arkansas River. The party were approaching the river but a few miles above Fort Gibson. Here, or somewhere in the vicinity, they would remain for several days, till they could outfit for their long journey through the wilderness. They were now somewhat further from their destination than when starting from their camp on Little River. For they had been traveling slightly east of north. From here on their course would lead toward the northwest.

Besides being a military post, Fort Gibson was an outfitting point for all the Western country, and supplies of every kind could be obtained here in abundance. The partners expected to buy several wagon-loads of



IN THE LEAD WAS THE CREEK — RIDING FOR LIFE.

flour, bacon and similar commodities, with wagons to haul them in, and hire teamsters for the wagons. Here they would also arm their cowboys for the months of travel through a country swarming with hostile Indians.

CHAPTER XI

A WILD NIGHT RIDE

"SAM, did you ever see as many cattle on one prairie?" Jess called out to the half-breed, who was riding on the other side of the marching line. The whole country ahead of them appeared spotted over with grazing herds and mounted herders. "Why do you suppose so many outfits are hanging up here?"

"Waiting to cross the river, I'd guess. The Arkansas must be on a boom after all these rains."

"Do you suppose they're lying by for it to run down?"

"They must be. I can't think of anything else that would keep so many of them camping around here."

"Well, it's a long, long river; heads in the Rocky Mountains, I recollect. I'd hate to think we've got to sit down on the bank till the high water runs by. Burgess would be frantic."

"The Arkansas is pretty wide here at Fort Gibson. If it's very high, we may have trouble ourselves. We don't want — Is that Burgess waving at us?"

"Yes, it is. He's going to camp before we get in among all those droves. And I'm glad of it. A wise idea, that."

Jess galloped away till he was ahead of the leaders, then turned them out of the road. Now they promptly

fell to cropping the grass. The cowboy sat quietly on his grazing horse, watching the cattle scatter over the prairie.

The wagon kept on along the road for several hundred yards, following Burgess, and finally camped in a grove by a little stream. Two cowboys remained with the cattle, to keep them from scattering too much. The others busied themselves with catching fresh horses for the night-herding.

Scarcely had the wagon stopped when a horseman came by and halted a few minutes to talk with Burgess and Granny. He proved to be a cowboy, from one of the neighboring camps. Not long after he had gone, the Bar-Circle hands began to come in.

The horses that had been ridden during the afternoon were unsaddled, the saddles being thrown down near the fire and the horses turned loose. First every one of the wet-backed, saddle-marked animals lay down on the grass and rolled. Then they got up and went grazing and snorting toward the herd. The cowboys were now scattering over the prairie around the camp, driving down stakes to lariat their newly-caught horses to.

The party had traveled later than usual to-day, and it was thick dusk when all the men gathered around the camp-fire, ready for supper.

"Well, Mr. Burgess, when do we cross the river?" inquired Dick McCarty, while they were waiting.

"That's hard telling, Dick," answered the Californian. "A cowboy from another camp stopped here

a little while ago, and he told me some rather discouraging news. He says between twenty and thirty outfits are herding their cattle on this prairie, waiting to get across."

"Why don't they cross, then? What are they waiting for?" demanded Johnson.

"That's easier said than done," Burgess replied. "The Arkansas is higher than it has been for many years, that cowboy told me. It's bank-full everywhere, and out of its banks in most places. It's so very wide that cattle won't attempt to swim it; and they won't swim it unless they're forced to. The cowboys can't do anything with them on their horses out in the river. There are some Indians here that are expert canoemen. They can usually take a drove across. But they charge big prices."

"Big prices or little prices, we'd better hire them," remarked Gregory. "It's apt to be the cheapest in the long run."

"Phil, the trouble with them is that they're engaged two or three weeks ahead," answered Burgess. "They can't cross more than two droves a day — sometimes not more than one, when a drove breaks up, and the cattle start off in different directions. And nearly every outfit here has them engaged. That's what all these droves are doing here — waiting for their turns to cross. The Arkansas has been booming for several weeks, and it may keep booming for several weeks longer."

"We can't think of hanging around here a month

or so. We've got too far to go — altogether too far to travel," declared Johnson. "If we can't get the canoemen in two or three days, we'll have to cross without canoes. That's all there is to that."

"If we can," put in Gregory.

"Oh, I've no doubt we can make it across somehow, if we try hard enough," Burgess said. "But we may have trouble — we may have a world of trouble while we're about it."

"It's little we care for trouble," laughed Jess. "We've had scads of that already. Ought to be used to it by this time."

"That's right. Trouble and we are boon companions," Gregory observed, with a smile.

"Yes, we certainly have had a time of it on this trip," growled Johnson. "We've splashed and waded and swum nearly every step of the way from Red River here. I never saw as much water fall in the same length of time, it seems to me — never in all my days."

"And the clouds look like we might be in for another good soaker to-night," Dick McCarthy spoke up, pointing with his broiling-stick to some black masses that were accumulating in the northwest.

"Let's hope we may get at least a shower, boys," said Gregory, jovially, as he impaled a slice of beef on a dogwood stick and held it over the fire to broil. "I haven't been wet since yesterday. Don't feel quite right without one wetting a day. Two would be better. I'm turning to a turtle. Webs will soon begin to grow between my fingers."

"Our cattle ought to be able to swim the Arkansas, or the Mississippi, or any other river. They've had plenty of practice," remarked Jess.

"There's one consolation," Burgess suggested. "This wet spell can't last forever, and we ought to be almost through it. It will be dry enough when it does get dry. You can count on that."

Supper was ready when Granny's big skillet of bread had baked and his coffee had boiled. The men preferred to cook meat for themselves, broiling it on long sticks held over the fire. When the beef was ready to eat, the skillet-lid was taken off, the coffee-pot placed within reach, and the tin-cups passed around. Then the meal proceeded.

For an hour or so after supper the whole party sat or lounged around the camp-fire, a few of them smoking, the others picking their teeth with grass-stems. One after another, as usual, they took turns at telling stories. All of them had had much interesting experience, in different parts of the world.

When at last the circle broke up for the night, the men got their blankets out of the wagon, rolled themselves in them, and lay down on the ground to sleep. Some were in the tent, and two were under the big wagon; but most of them were in front of the camp-fire. Jess was one of those who slept by the fire.

At two o'clock he felt somebody shaking him, and sat up quickly. It was now his turn to go on herd-duty till daylight.

He was soon up and dressed. With his saddle in

one hand and his bridle in the other, he started out in search of his horse. The sky was now thickly overcast with clouds and, in the absence of the moon, the night was very dark. There were occasional lightning-flashes, followed by the rather mild rumblings of thunder.

Guided by the lightning, Jess soon found his horse, which was staked not far away. While girting on his saddle, he heard Burgess calling him; and after mounting he rode back to camp.

He and Burgess discussed the situation, and decided not to call out any more hands for the present. There would be time enough for that if a storm set in. All the men had lost much sleep recently, and it was important that they be allowed to rest.

So Jess rode away, and soon reached the cattle. Sam Patterson, who would be on duty with him, was already out there — somewhere. The lightning-flashes showed the cattle, all lying down. They also revealed the half-breed sitting quietly on his horse.

"Good night for a stampede, Sam — don't you think so?" Jess inquired, as he rode toward the other cowboy. Only when the lightning flashed could they see each other.

"Well, yes, it may be. The cattle seem quiet enough, though. They don't show any signs of being frightened, or even nervous."

"They may not show any advance signs. Often they don't, I'm told. But when they once make a break there'll be signs enough, I guess."

The conversation was kept up for several minutes. At length the two cowboys rode away, in different directions. When on opposite sides of the herd, they stopped and sat quietly in their saddles, allowing their horses to graze. The night was so dark that they would not attempt to keep riding around the cattle, as was the custom of those on herd-duty.

Half an hour dragged by, and still the two night-herders were sitting quietly on their horses. The black clouds still hung low, and the lightnings kept flashing at regular intervals, but the threatened storm had not yet set in. Sometimes the herders whistled and sometimes they sang to quiet the cattle, though there seemed little need of such precautions now.

Soon occasional rain-drops began to patter down. Jess turned his coat-collar up at first. But the rain-drops thickened till they became a slow, steady drizzle. Now he untied his blanket from behind his saddle. After unrolling it, he folded it in halves, then fastened it around his neck and shoulders with a blanket-pin. Looking across the herd when the lightning flashed, he could see that Sam was protecting himself from the drizzle in the same way.

With the beginning of the rain the steers commenced to get up, and soon most of them could be seen standing quietly. Jess spread out his blanket, so that it covered himself and much of his horse. Then he sat and waited for daylight. The horse stood motionless now, and the rain-drops pattered softly, steadily on his rider's hat and blanket. Finally, nothing occurring to



AWAY THEY ALL WENT AT HEADLONG SPEED.

break the monotony, Jess fell into a doze. He sat erect, but his head bent forward till his chin rested on his breast.

How long he dozed he never knew. But when he awoke the thunder of hoofs and frightened bellowing filled his ears, and his horse was bounding along under him! Wide awake on the instant, he realized at once that the cattle had stampeded.

More than that, they had come straight toward him. If his horse had been as heavy-eyed as he himself, both might have been surprised and run down and trampled to death. But the horse had taken to flight at the first movement of the cattle, and was running for life before them.

In the pitchlike darkness Jess could see nothing; all his hopes of safety depended upon the keener sight or instinct of his horse. Soon came a lightning-flash, and by it he could make out only open prairie ahead. Turning in the saddle, he waited for another flash. It came at length and revealed, seemingly, all those twenty-five hundred steers coming at a mad speed behind him! Now the terrified cowboy not only let his horse go, but urged him on. Swift-footed destruction was on their trail.

Away they all went at headlong speed, the lone cowboy riding a race with death, and the thousands of panic-stricken steers bellowing at his horse's heels. And through it all and above it all could be heard the loud, wild ringing of the bell-steer's bell.

For a time Jess, like the nag he bestrode, was intent

only upon keeping ahead of the horned avalanche behind him. He realized that if his horse should miss his footing once, there would be nothing to keep both horse and rider from being trampled to death. But the horse, fully aware of the deadly peril pursuing him, did not intend to stumble if he could help it. On he bounded tirelessly.

Every time the lightning flashed, Jess tried to make out what was ahead of him. Fortunately nothing could be seen here but level prairie. But there was no telling when they might come to a very different kind of country.

Soon the young cowboy began to wonder if he could not turn aside and escape from before the cattle. But that he would not dare attempt till he could get further ahead.

His horse was gaining a little, and he urged him to greater speed. Soon he was gratified to see, when the lightning shone out, that a hundred yards or more separated him from the foremost steers. Now he was pulling on one rein slightly, intending to turn to one side and gradually get out of the cattle's course, when suddenly he felt the horse plunging downward in the darkness. The next moment both horse and rider seemed to be turning a somersault, flying headlong through the air!

The instant he felt the horse going down, Jess, with an instinct for self-preservation, threw himself out of the saddle and to one side. That was to keep the horse from falling upon him — something that would

otherwise inevitably happen if the animal turned a somersault.

As afterwards appeared, the horse had come in his flight to a shallow prairie ravine, with an upright bank scarcely a yard high on the near side, and only a gradual upward slope on the far side. The flying horse had merely plunged over the low bank in the dark.

Whether the animal really turned a somersault or not, Jess never knew. He himself landed in some loose, water-washed sand in the dry bottom of the ravine, where he turned several somersaults — went rolling over and over! He was severely jarred and somewhat stunned, but not seriously hurt.

Just as he was leaping to his feet, the lightning flashed again, and he caught a glimpse of his horse, already up and running away. But the same flash revealed something else — hundreds of steers not many yards from that low bank, and rushing straight toward him!

Fortunately the same glance that showed him the steers made the discovery that the bank was a low ledge of rock, with a slight hollow under it.

Realizing instinctively that the steers must soon be coming down upon him, he made a dive on his "all-fours" for that ledge. The hollow underneath was scarcely a foot deep, and he had barely time to ensconce himself in it when the cattle came plunging into the ravine!

Some of the steers fell, bellowing more loudly in their terror; but the bank was low, and they quickly

leaped up and went bounding on, worse frightened than before. Others seemed to plunge from the bank without falling, and kept straight on.

To the badly frightened Jess, squeezing himself desperately into the shallow space under the rocky shelf, it seemed that every one of those twenty-five hundred longhorns passed exactly over him. The cattle had got somewhat strung out, the slower ones dropping to the rear, and they must have been two or three minutes in getting by.

At last, however, they had all gone, and the thunder from their thousands of hoofs soon began to die away in the distance. Fearing that there might be some stragglers still to come, Jess dared not emerge from his shelter for a few minutes longer.

When at last he did venture out, he waited for a lightning-flash, half expecting to see several dead or crippled steers. But the bank was low, and extended only a few yards above and below, and all had escaped unhurt.

The drizzle was still falling, and the night was as black as ever. Doubting very much if he could find his way back to camp through the thick darkness, Jess, after rearranging his blanket, started on in pursuit of the thundering hoofs and the loudly ringing bell.

CHAPTER XII

IN A GRIZZLY'S JAWS

FAINTER and still fainter grew the trampling and the bell-ringing, until only now and then could they be heard. Jess kept following, at a trot, though he sometimes wondered if it would not have been wiser to go back. He had dropped to a slow walk, and was thinking seriously of trying to retrace his steps, when he heard a nicker but a few yards away.

Now he stood still, waiting for the lightning. When at length it flashed, he saw a saddled and bridled horse — his own. In some way the animal had got out from before the cattle, and had stopped and gone to grazing. He was still frightened and nervous, however, and as his master approached came to meet him — something very unusual for a cow-horse.

Mounted again, Jess was soon riding on, as fast as he dared in the dark, in pursuit of the fleeing steers. All that he had to guide him was the bell, and that could barely be heard at first; but gradually it became more distinct. Now he inferred that the cattle had stopped. But they had only dropped to a slower gait and were still moving. The rain had ceased and day was breaking when he overtook them.

They were going at a walk, and he rode round till he had got ahead of them, and stopped them. Soon

he discovered that scarcely half of the big drove were here. The others had doubtless split off, all at once or a few at a time, and gone in different directions. Sam Patterson was not to be seen. If he had ridden with the stampeding herd, he must have stayed with some of the missing steers.

Knowing that other hands would come to his assistance sooner or later, Jess made no attempt to drive the cattle back to camp. All he did was to keep them under loose herd.

The sun was shining when Gregory and three of the cowboys came, following the well-beaten trail. They were riding at a gallop.

"Have you seen anything of Sam?" was Jess's first inquiry.

"Not a thing. But he's all right, I guess. The trail shows that steers kept splitting off, a few hundred at a time. He must have ridden with some of the other bunches," Gregory said. And his surmise afterwards proved to be correct. Other hands were trailing the other cattle.

The five men now rounded up the grazing steers and started them back toward camp. The distance was more than ten miles, and the sun was near the meridian when they arrived there.

One bunch of two or three hundred head had already been brought in; and at intervals during the afternoon other bunches, some larger and some smaller, returned from their wanderings. With one of the largest came the half-breed, who had almost as excit-

ing a story to tell of that wild ride through the dark as had Jess.

There was much hard riding during this day and the next. Not long before sunset of the second day the cattle were counted, and all the steers were found to be under herd again.

The Bar-Circle party now felt much relieved as they gathered around their cheerful camp-fire at nightfall. The night was cool to chilliness, and the glow and crackle of that blazing pile of logs looked very attractive.

After supper the whole party, except the two night-herders, lingered around the fire, as usual. Most of them sat on their saddle-blankets and leaned back against their saddles. Burgess reclined with one hand on those precious treasure-bags. Soon, as often happened, the conversation drifted round to gold-mining. After his partners had entertained the circle with many of their ups and downs in California, Burgess related some of his. Finally Jess interrupted him:

"Mr. Burgess, you once started to tell us about your adventure with the grizzly, but something stopped you. Why not let us have that to-night?"

The Californian gazed thoughtfully into the fire for a few moments, then began his story. After some explanation of previous happenings, he said:

"One morning, while we were at the diggings near the South Fork of American River, word was brought to camp that fresh bear-signs had been discovered on some brush-covered hills a few miles away. There

was a meat-famine in the camp, and a lot of us armed ourselves and started out to see what we could find. We suspected the bear of being a grizzly, and there was a good-sized party of us — nine in all, I believe — Phil Gregory and I and seven others.

“After getting among the hills and brush, we were cautious enough to keep together for a good while. But when we had been beating the thickets for an hour or two without finding any game, we began to scatter. I soon wandered off by myself, and most of the others did the same.

“I had rambled several hundred yards from the rest of my party, when I came to a big thicket and pushed into it. I kept working my way in, and soon halted in a small opening, near the middle of the thicket. While I was standing there, looking about, the bushes rustled behind me, and I turned to find myself face to face with a huge grizzly bear — the most horrible-looking monster I have ever seen, or ever shall see, I hope.

“For a moment or two I stood paralyzed with horror, unable to move an inch. But I quickly came to myself; for with an awful, blood-freezing roar of rage the monster rushed straight at me! His hair seemed all on end, and his mouth was open and every tooth displayed. I threw up my gun and fired a hasty shot, then turned to run for my life.

“But the grizzly was too close. Before I could take a dozen steps, he was upon me! With one blow of his great paw he struck me to the ground! These

scars on my neck are where his claws first touched me. They went down my back, tearing open my clothes, and every claw plowing its way through my flesh!

"But that was only the beginning. Scarcely had the monster struck me down, when he seized me by the left thigh, his teeth crushing through flesh and bone. Then he shook me in his rage — shook me as a puppy shakes a rag — shook me as a terrier shakes a rat — shook me till all the breath was out of my body! Again and again he shook me. He seemed determined to shake the very life out of me.

"At last he put me down. Fearfully wounded as I was, and dazed as I felt, I had sense enough left to realize my awful situation. In fact, after I had had time to recover somewhat, I've never been more keenly alert. The grizzly was standing over me, watching closely for any signs of remaining life. If I had moved an inch, he would have bitten me through and through instantly. I've no doubt of that. But I lay as motionless as a corpse.

"There was a six-shooter at my belt, and a knife too; and the bear was close enough for me to have used either. But I dared not move a finger to get them out. And even if I could have drawn them, I wouldn't have dared to try to let the life out of that huge, shaggy body with knife or pistol. The monster was as big as an ox, not in my imagination, but in reality. He wasn't so tall as one of our Texas oxen, but he looked broader.

"So I lay still — very, very still; as still as a man can

only when he knows that his life depends on it. I could hear men calling to one another in the distance, and understood that the other hunters had heard my shot and were coming. They easily guessed what the shot meant, but I had been too far away for them to locate me exactly by the report.

"While they were still several hundred yards from my thicket, they kept calling to one another to know who had fired. Later, after all had got together, they found out who was missing and began to call me by name. Of course, situated as I was, I didn't dare answer or make any signal. The grizzly was still standing over me, and I was watching him from under nearly closed eyelids. Eager as I was to have my friends find me, I could only wait and listen, and hope and pray that they would come before the monster took it into his head to give me a finishing bite.

"Soon I could hear the hunters beating the near-by thickets, and they kept calling to me and to one another as they moved about. How I longed to shout to them, to shriek aloud to let them know where I was and the awful death that hung over me. But I dared not open my mouth; I dared not so much as draw a long breath.

"As my friends drew nearer, I could easily tell that the bear, too, was listening. Soon he uttered a growl—a low but angry growl. The nearness of the hunters irritated him. He resented their coming, as he had mine, as an intrusion upon his privacy.

"But instead of coming to the thicket I was in, the

hunters passed it and began to move away. Receiving no answer from me, they took it for granted that I was not in hearing distance.

"Now my heart sank like lead within me. With help scarcely a stone's throw off, I must lie there in my helplessness and let them go away. It was horrible — horrible beyond the power of language to describe. But a shout or even a word from me would have been my death-signal.

"The whole country there was dotted over with thickets, most of them not many yards apart. My friends, all together now, were moving from thicket to thicket. But they had missed the right one.

"As the hunting party got further and further away, I despaired of any help from that source. But I believed that if I could only keep still long enough, the brute would go off and leave me.

"When the hunters had moved so far that I could scarcely hear them, the grizzly relaxed his listening, angry attitude. But instead of starting off, as I had hoped, he put his nose down and began to smell me. And maybe you can imagine a little part of the horror I felt when I tell you that something in the monster's actions warned me that he was thinking of eating me then and there!

"Nobody who has never been in a similar situation can begin to understand what my feelings were as I lay helpless and felt that big nose gliding up and down my body, in a fond, eager way, and sniffing at me hungrily. It was like a cat running her nose over a

fat rat that she has killed, trying to decide where to take the first bite.

"That nose kept gliding over my body till it came to my head. Then I could feel the monster's hot breath against my face. Soon the nose glided on to the wound on my neck and back, and the bear began to lick my blood greedily. He must have been very hungry.

"But I had no intention of lying there and meekly allowing myself to be devoured alive. Weak as I was — and my thigh was bleeding all the time — I promptly resolved to make at least a show of resistance. Even if I couldn't save my life, I hoped to give the bear a death-wound while he was killing me. My bullet had wounded him slightly, in the shoulder, but only enough to irritate him. Up to this time I had tried to remain as motionless as a dead man. But now my right hand began to steal toward the handle of my six-shooter. I had not strength enough left to use a knife.

"But the movement was promptly detected, and the monster stopped licking my bloody neck and roared a deep, warning growl right into my ear. My blood froze in my veins — froze with horror.

"Instantly I turned to a corpse again. The grizzly stood over me, waiting for another movement to confirm his suspicions that I was still alive. What he might have done soon I shudder to think. But while he was still watching me, in a threatening attitude, his attention was diverted by a shout not far away. My

friends had turned and seemed to be coming back.

"Now my hopes sprang up once more, and I abandoned my desperate resolve to try to kill the bear myself. If I only dared utter a cry for help! But perhaps the hunters would come to the right thicket this time.

"The grizzly was fully aware that enemies were approaching. He raised his head and stood waiting and listening. Closer and closer came the hunters, still moving from thicket to thicket. Soon the huge brute standing over me began to growl and show signs of anger. Now I lay as nearly motionless as possible, lest he should vent his rage on me.

"Gradually, while I waited and listened with awful anxiety, my friends drew nearer and nearer, till they were at the outer edge of my thicket. The bushes were high enough to conceal the bear, and I dreaded that some of the hunters might plunge in and get killed. Yet I dared not open my mouth to save them.

"But there was a path and a narrow open way leading into the thicket — the path by which I myself had entered — and one of the hunters followed it in till he caught a glimpse of the bear.

" 'Here he is, boys!' I heard him sing out. 'He's a grizzly, and a whale of a big one, if there ever was a big one!'

"Exclamations of awe and horror were uttered as different members of the party ventured in far enough to catch sight of the great beast.

" 'But what can have become of Joe?' I heard

somebody ask. And pretty soon another man called out:

“ ‘Yonder he lies! I can just catch a glimpse of him through the brush! The grizzly is standing right over him!’ ”

“ And then somebody else said: ‘The bear has killed him. No wonder he didn’t answer when we called!’ ”

“ ‘Yes, he’s dead. No doubt about that, I guess — poor Joe!’ another hunter exclaimed.

“ More exclamations of horror followed the discovery of me, as each took a peep through the bushes at me. I could hear every word distinctly; and yet with that monster standing guard over me, and now growling furiously, I dared not move or utter a sound. Presently somebody said:

“ ‘Let’s get our guns ready and take aim and all fire together!’ ”

“ Possibly you can imagine my feelings when I heard that proposal to fire a volley at the bear. I knew there was no telling how or where a party of excited hunters would shoot. Instead of being rescued, I found myself in as much danger from my friends as from my enemy the grizzly. And yet I dared not speak or move or make any sign; for the bear was now in such a rage that if I had exhibited the slightest evidence of being alive, he would have bitten the life out of me then and there.

“ Finally, after an age of suspense as it seemed to me, I heard Phil Gregory’s voice call out:

“ ‘Boys, that won't do! Joe may not be dead! We must get that “varmint” away from him before we shoot!’

“ ‘Oh, Joe's as dead as a door-nail!’ somebody else declared. But the others agreed with Phil that it would not be safe to shoot where there was any danger of hitting me. For that I was truly thankful, though I dared not open my mouth to say so.

“Now followed several minutes of consultation among the hunters. They spoke loudly, excitedly, and I could hear every word as plainly as you boys can hear me. All sorts of plans were suggested. But at last Phil Gregory proposed to enter the thicket till the bear started after him. Then he would retreat, and when the grizzly had followed him out of the brush, the other men would fire a volley into the brute. Everybody promptly pronounced that a good plan; and I could hear them discussing the best place to stand.

“At last, when all were in position, Phil started into the thicket. I dared not look, but I could hear him talking to the men behind him. And I knew he must be coming from the more savage and furious way the grizzly kept growling.

“At last, when Phil was not more than twenty or thirty yards away, the monster poured out an awful roar and made straight for him!

“ ‘Look out! Here we come, boys!’ Phil yelled. And I raised my head in time to see him go tearing through the brush, with the grizzly almost at his heels.

“But I soon dodged down again. For after fol-

lowing to the edge of the thicket, the bear turned and came straight back to me. And the first thing he did was to put down his head, growling furiously all the time, and run his big nose over me again. I suppose he wanted to make sure that I was all there.

"Phil soon told the hunters that he would try again, and I could hear him coming. Presently the bear left me and made another charge. But again he stopped before reaching the edge of the thicket, and came back and stood over me. He seemed to think that the hunters were trying to rob him of his prey — as they were. And acting on the principle that a man under his paw was worth half a dozen at large, he refused to be enticed away.

"While he was absent the second time, I managed to draw my six-shooter, and lay with it in my hand. But I was so weak I could scarcely lift it; and I had no thought of using it unless the grizzly should attack me.

"For half an hour or longer the hunters kept trying to toll the bear out of the thicket. Again and again Phil approached, and the grizzly always charged him promptly. But the hunters didn't succeed in luring the bear out of the brush, or even where they could get a clear view of him. And the moment he turned back he always made straight for me, and stood over me again. He seemed determined that I, his intended dinner, should not be taken from him.

"The big fellow was in a fearful rage by now, and kept growling frightfully all the time. His growls, as



PHIL — WAS CARRYING A RIFLE IN HIS LEFT HAND AND A CLUB
IN HIS RIGHT.

he stood over me, were something horrible to listen to. I lay still for my very life. If I had moved or uttered a sound, he would have crushed or bitten the life out of me. I haven't a doubt of that. But at last I heard Phil shout:

“ ‘ Boys, get ready! We can't fool with that “ varmint ” all day! I'm going to fetch him out this time — all the way out! ’

“ As Phil came through the bushes again, the bear's growls grew louder, and he advanced a step or two, with his mouth open. Phil, I could see, was carrying a rifle in his left hand and a club in his right. Presently I saw him draw back his arm, and the next moment the club came whizzing through the air and struck the bear on the head!

“ With an awful roar, the like of which I've never heard before or since, the monster rushed at him! I raised myself to my elbow, and threw up my six-shooter, intending to give him a bullet from the rear as he went. But my hand was so unsteady, and Phil and the other hunters were in such exact range, that I dared not pull the trigger.

“ No stopping at the edge of the thicket this time! Out the grizzly burst, and the moment he showed himself in the open, there was a mighty roar! The whole party had fired a volley into him.

“ Some of them afterwards admitted to me that their hearts stood still and their hands shook with fright or excitement at the first plain sight of the great bear; and that if they didn't miss him it was because

his huge size made such a thing well-nigh impossible.

"The volley crippled the bear, it seems — broke one of his fore legs; but it failed to kill him. Perhaps the fact that he was disabled saved a life or two. For the brute, roaring horribly all the time, charged his enemies with fury, even on three legs, and put them all to flight — scattered them like so many rabbits!

"Some of the hunters were armed with double-barrel shot-guns, and most of them carried six-shooters, and they kept banging away so fast that it sounded to me as if a battle were raging out there. The grizzly was so big that it was almost impossible to miss him at short range, but nearly fifty shots were fired into him.

"Finally the growls ceased and the shots ceased, and pretty soon I heard somebody say: 'He's dead at last! Ain't he a buster, though?' And then somebody else said: 'Now let's see about Joe!'

"But before they could get to me I had fainted dead away. That was partly from loss of blood, and partly because the strain I had been under was relaxed.

"When I came to, I found myself lying on a litter, and my friends were carrying me down to camp.

"The grizzly was skinned and cut up and weighed piecemeal, and the boys afterwards told me he weighed fourteen hundred pounds. That sounds incredible to any one who never saw him, but I could easily believe it. As I said before, he was a very monster, as big as an ox.

"But I wasn't done with the grizzly when he was killed, nor even when he was skinned and cut to pieces.

For two weeks, which seemed like two years, I lay in a fever and delirium. And every minute of the two weeks that frightful monster stood over me, sometimes growling horribly, and always just on the point of devouring me. He was usually larger than life, and sometimes he seemed to grow and swell and swell and grow till he loomed up as big as a world.

"There was a doctor in the camp — a man who had practiced medicine at home — and he assured my friends that I couldn't possibly get well. And it did take me a long time. The boys had saved the bear's skin for me, but I wouldn't have it. The very sight of it gave me the horrors.

"I didn't need anything to remind me of that grizzly. He had left plenty of reminders on my body — marks of both teeth and claws. And thanks to him, I have limped — shall limp from California to my grave."

An unbroken, almost breathless silence had been maintained during the whole of the thrilling narrative. Now a buzz of conversation broke out, lasting several minutes. At length Burgess arose and took up his gold-heavy saddle-bags. As he moved toward the tent with them, he said:

"Let's to our blankets, boys. We try the river tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIII

FAILURE AFTER FAILURE

BUT the Bar-Circlers were not destined to try the Arkansas next day.

Soon after Burgess had concluded the story of his encounter with the grizzly, and gone to the tent to bed, the party of cowboys around the camp-fire broke up for the night, and all sought sleeping places. A few took their blankets and crawled under the wagon, but some slept in the tent, and others, Jess among them, stretched themselves by the camp-fire. The night was more or less cloudy, but there were no marked indications of rain, and all except the two night-herders were allowed to rest.

It was far along in the night when Jess was awakened. The first thing he knew he was standing on his feet. His eyes were heavy, but an instinct for self-preservation had caused him to leap up. The thunder of countless flying hoofs was making the very air tremble.

The other men were either already up or getting up. The stampeded cattle, not theirs but other herds grazing on the prairie to the north, were coming straight toward the camp!

As was afterwards learned, one herd had stampeded and started two others; and the three herds together,

about eight thousand head in all, were bearing straight down upon the Bar-Circle camp! And more than that, they were now so close that there was little time to do anything toward escaping from their path.

"Look out, boys! Here they come!" yelled Gregory, very unnecessarily. For the uproar was something frightful. Already the horses lariatied near the camp, warned by instinct, had broken their ropes or pulled up their stakes, and could be heard clattering away.

The camp was in a grove, and as the thousands of panic-stricken steers came plunging and bellowing toward it, every man sprang for a tree. Jess picked out his tree and stood by it, ready to climb if necessary. Most of the others did the same. The fat cook not only found a tree, but went to climbing it.

There had been a large fire at supper-time. Most of it had now burnt out, but there were many blazing chunks, ends of burnt sticks, lying all around where the fire had been. As the fleeing cattle came closer, Jess seized a fiery chunk and stood waving it to frighten them away. Burgess promptly did the same, and so did all the others standing near, Gregory and Johnson among them.

Granny was still climbing — climbing as fast as he could. The nearer the stampeding steers came the higher he climbed. But by chance he stepped on a dead limb, which snapped off and let him come crashing through the tree-top to the ground!

The Deserter, rolled in his blanket, was still lying

where he had thrown himself down at bed-time. And, incredible as it seems, with that frightful uproar around him, he was still sleeping peacefully — sleepyhead that he was. He was lying back in the shadow, and nobody had noticed him.

But as the fat cook came crashing to the ground, he fell squarely on top of the Deserter. Thanks to what he had fallen on, Granny was not hurt. But the former soldier was awakened — very rudely awakened — and he promptly began to swear. But on discovering what was taking place around him, he suddenly quit swearing and went to climbing. Up one tree he went, as fast as he could, and up another went the cook, almost as fast.

As the steers came down, thundering and bellowing, upon the camp, the men still on the ground stood waving their blazing fire-brands wildly. Some, Jess among them, waved blazing chunks with one hand, while with the other they hurled other blazing chunks at the wild-eyed leaders of the stampede. The steers split apart and thundered on, passing by on both sides of the camp.

All the men, both those on the ground and the two in trees, kept yelling frantically, and those on the ground kept waving and hurling their fire. But in spite of that the tent, which stood several yards back, was quickly pushed down and trampled into the ground.

Still the cattle went thundering by on both sides, hundreds and thousands of them. Their trampling, their terrified bellowings and their crashing through

some near-by brush added to the uproar that filled the air.

As the divided animals kept crowding closer to the camp, on both sides, the men in the tree-tops kept climbing higher. Unfortunately for Granny, he had chosen a small tree — little more than a big sapling — which, under his weight, suddenly bent over and left him hanging head down. The cattle were rushing by on both sides of the tree, and rubbing against it, and his frightened head was only a foot or two above their horns. The sapling was bending and swaying, and Granny was swinging back and forth and also bobbing up and down.

Jess, busy as he was with his fire-throwing and fire-waving, noticed the inverted cook hanging wild-eyed over the cattle, and he scarcely knew whether to laugh at the comical figure or to be alarmed for him. But nothing could be done.

Closer and still closer the divided stream of fleeing steers kept pressing upon the camp. More than once the wagon, big and heavy as it was, seemed on the point of being overturned. The men on the ground not only yelled and waved their fire-brands, some of them also firing their six-shooters in the air, but they actually had to beat off the terror-crazed brutes with their blazing chunks.

Fast as the cattle ran, it was several minutes before all of the eight thousand head had swept by. And the time seemed much longer than it really was to the men who were fighting them off.

When at length steers had ceased to pass, Jess turned again to look for the cook. Granny was still hanging head down, on his bent, swaying sapling. The Deserter soon descended from his perch of safety, but Granny could not come.

"Just look yonder, boys!" cried Phil Gregory. "If that doesn't look like a big, fat, overgrown 'possum hanging to that sapling, what does it look like?"

The discovery of the cook's embarrassing situation was the signal for a shower of jokes.

"Come and ease me down, boys, some of you!" pleaded the inverted Granny. "I cain't climb backwards, the way this saplin' has bowed over with me! All I can possibly do is to hang on for dear life, and that's just what I am doin'."

But this was too good an opportunity to miss. Everybody had to offer some advice.

"Granny, let all holts go, and light on your feet like a cat!" suggested Dick McCarty.

"Try jumping up and down, and maybe the tree will break with you," somebody else advised.

"What's the use of tellin' me what to do, boys? Don't you see I cain't do a thing but hang on?" demanded the exasperated cook. "And if I hang here much longer, the blood's likely to flow to my head and make me so dizzy I'll fall on my head and break my neck. You know how fat I am. And then who'll do the cookin' for you, boys?"

"Hang where you are!" growled the Deserter. "It serves you just right for fallin' on top of me, you

great, big toad-frog! You smashed me as flat as a pancake, and nearly cracked some of my ribs!"

"General," laughed Jess, "if you had any feeling of pity in your heart for a suffering fellow-mortal, you'd go there and lie down and let Granny fall on you again. You'd be ever so much softer than the ground."

But the information that the cook had actually fallen upon the sleepy-headed Deserter so endeared Granny to the cowboys that they now went to his rescue, bending the sapling lower till he could drop to the ground.

The night, being cloudy, was now very dark. Much of the camp-fire had been scattered — thrown at the steers. While some of the men were renewing the fire, Jess and others went out to where their horses had been staked. When they returned, Jess said:

"Mr. Burgess, not much chance for us to do anything till daylight. Every hoof's gone, even to the hobbled yoke-cattle. We're all afoot."

"So I supposed," answered the head of the outfit, quietly. "Well, there's no help for it. We couldn't have done a thing to speak of till daylight, anyhow. I hope the cattle won't scatter much."

The Bar-Circle herd had not been among those that had run by the camp. But the stampeded steers had made straight toward the Bar-Circle cattle, and they, too, had soon joined in the stampede. The night-riders had not returned to camp, which meant that they had run with their herd.

Some of the men at the camp, and especially the

sleepy-headed Deserter, soon sought their blankets again, but Jess and the others sat around the fire, talking over the exciting experiences they had just passed through. They ate breakfast while it was still dark, and at the first streaks of dawn all got their bridles and set out in the direction the stampeded animals had taken. The two night-herders had not yet returned.

For hours the party on foot kept tramping in quest of their horses. After they had walked several miles, without finding a single horse, Gregory suggested that they could have gone to some of the other camps and borrowed animals to ride. All agreed that that would have been better; but now that they had made a start on foot they kept on.

At last, when the sun was high, they came upon their little drove of horses, all grazing quietly. The animals that had pulled up their stakes were not among them. With no small difficulty the men succeeded in catching a horse apiece, and having mounted, they drove the loose animals back to camp.

Then they saddled up and set off for the serious work of the day — finding and bringing back the lost cattle.

After riding a few miles, they met a party of cowboys from one of the other outfits whose herds had stampeded. Not having lost their lariated horses, these men had got an early start, and were returning with several hundred head of the runaway cattle. Among them were many that wore the bar-circle.

Hurrying on, the Bar-Circle party were not long in

meeting their own night-herders. These two men were returning with about five hundred steers. They reported that not only were the Bar-Circle cattle mixed with the three other stampeded droves, but that all the stampeded cattle had scattered badly, having run in many directions.

And so it proved. The whole of that day, as well as of the two following days, was spent in rounding up and driving back the runaway animals. There were more than ten thousand of the steers that had stampeded, but four sets of cowboys were scouring the country far and near in search of them. The cattle were hopelessly mixed, and but for the fact that every animal wore the road-brand of its own herd, separating them would have been impossible.

As it was, even with the hearty co-operation of the four outfits, three whole days went by before the stampeded cattle were all brought back and divided into their respective herds. Some of the steers were found more than twenty miles away.

Of the nearly thirty droves of cattle under herd on the south side of the Arkansas when the Bar-Circle party arrived there, one or two had crossed every day. But there were still just as many waiting to cross, for several new outfits had arrived. A few of these would lie by till the river ran down; but most of them were waiting for their turn to use the Creek canoemen.

"But that won't do for us," declared Burgess, as the Bar-Circle party were gathered around their camp-fire the first night after their herd had been restored to

its original proportions. "All these people are going only to Missouri or Illinois, and they have plenty of time to wait. But we've got thousands of miles to travel before cold weather, and we haven't a minute to spare."

"That's right, Joe," spoke up Gregory. "It's get there on time or never get there with us. These southern cattle, that never saw the snow fly, would stand a fine chance to starve to death with even six inches of snow on the ground."

"And besides all that, there are entirely too many cattle on this side of the river to suit me," Jess remarked. "Some of these rainy nights there'll be a general stampede around here, and then it will take at least a month to round up all these forty or fifty thousand cattle and sort them out. Even for what waiting we have to do, this is not a good place to wait."

"No, that it isn't," agreed Johnson. "We don't need any more experiences like that one the other night. Let's put into the river to-morrow morning, I say — if we don't stampede again before daybreak."

"What do you think, Jess?" inquired Burgess. "Can we make it across all right?"

The usually jovial cowboy now turned a serious face to his employer. "We can try," he replied thoughtfully. "But I must admit I'd feel ever so much better about it if we had those Indians and their canoes to give us a boost. I rode down to the river to-day. It's frightfully high — considerably more than a mile

wide, I'd guess. One outfit was crossing while I was there, and I don't know what they could have done without the canoes. Even with them they had a lot of trouble. But the way those red men can make their dug-out logs cut water is something amazing."

"It would be better if we had them to help us — not much doubt about that," admitted Burgess. "But they're engaged too far ahead. We can't wait so long. If we knew the water would run down soon, we might lie by three or four days for that; that is, if it wasn't for the constant danger of a stampede here. But the Arkansas is a long stream, and this rainy weather may reach all the way to its head. So we'd better move on as soon as we can."

The matter was fully discussed, and before the party around the camp-fire broke up for the night, a definite decision had been reached that they would attempt to cross on the following day.

So, soon after breakfast was over next morning, orders were given for all hands to saddle up. A suitable crossing place had already been picked out, and the Bar-Circle drove was soon marching toward it. For the present the wagon remained in camp. There was a flatboat ferry a mile or two above, and both wagon and oxen would be ferried across there.

On arriving at the river the steers were surrounded by all hands and, with no small difficulty, forced into the water. Headed by their accustomed leader, Ball, the bell-steer, they swam out a few hundred yards. But the swollen stream must have looked too wide to

swim; for Ball turned, and, swimming in a circle, finally came back to the bank he had started from.

The drivers met them at the water's edge and would not let them come out. It was hoped that, by keeping them in the river long enough, they would turn sooner or later, and swim for the far bank. But instead of that, they swam and drifted down stream, along the south bank. And so they kept on, all bawling drearily, till they had drifted a mile or two.

Burgess was obstinate, and declared that they must be made to cross. But Jess, feeling sorry for the soaked brutes, bawling so dolefully, finally said:

"This won't work, Mr. Burgess. We'd better let them come out a while, and then try again later. Somehow we got a bad start to-day."

Burgess, impatient to reach the north bank, was very reluctant to yield. But Gregory and Johnson agreed with Jess that a new start would be better. So the soaked, shivering steers were permitted to come out of the water and rest and sun themselves on the bank. And very glad they were to do so.

After the cattle were all out, a consultation was held among the drivers. The day was now well advanced, and it was thought best not to make another attempt to cross till the following morning. So the cattle were driven back to the prairie and allowed to go to grazing again.

Burgess and Johnson rode down to Fort Gibson that afternoon, crossing the river on a flatboat ferry below. They had gone to see about their outfitting

preparations. But they returned to the camp at dusk.

Between nine and ten o'clock on the following morning the Bar-Circle drove marched down to the river again. But by two o'clock of that afternoon they were back on the prairie, grazing as before. They had been forced into the swollen stream, but had refused to swim across, the experience of the first day being exactly repeated. Burgess was much disappointed, and was growing very impatient, but there seemed to be no help for it. Other outfits that attempted to cross without the assistance of the canoes were having similar troubles.

On the third morning the cattle were driven down to the river again, this time somewhat earlier than heretofore. Again they were urged into the water, and again they turned down stream and kept drifting till permitted to come ashore. But Burgess was in a determined mood. After letting them rest for an hour or two, he ordered them put into the water again.

This time Jess and several of the hands swam their horses out into the river, at the lower edge of the floating drove, to keep them from turning. But when once the cattle started down stream, swept along by the current, the swimming horsemen fought in vain to check them. Finally everybody had to get out of the way and let the cattle go where they would.

It was now too late in the day to try again. So for the third time the herd was driven back to the prairie to spend the night. The wagon had never been moved, and the camp remained at the same place.

By this time Burgess, who was a very nervous man, was well-nigh frantic.

"A pretty start we're making to get through to California!" he exclaimed, while he and the rest of the party were unsaddling at the camp. "We'll find the Rockies snowed under by the time we get there! And as for the Sierras, we'll never catch a glimpse of 'em! If we don't manage to cross before long, we shall have to abandon the whole trip."

"No, we'll never do that," declared Johnson. "Whatever happens or don't happen, we're going straight through."

"Then we've got to do better than we've been doing," Burgess answered. "Here's a whole week gone, and we haven't moved an inch. We'll try it again to-morrow, but it's almost certain to be the same old thing over again."

CHAPTER XIV

LEADING THE BELL-STEER

"MR. BURGESS, I believe I've thought out a plan that will take the cattle across in a whoop," Jess remarked next morning, while the Bar-Circle party were at breakfast.

"Let's hear it quick, Jess. If it works, it'll be worth a good suit of clothes to you — the best that can be found in Fort Gibson. I lay awake half the night, racking my poor brain, and I can't think of anything better than what we've tried."

"The reason the cattle won't try to swim across," the cowboy explained, "is because they have no leader. They follow Ball well enough on dry land. And if they could see him go ahead, and particularly if they could hear his bell, they'd follow him in the water."

"Yes," spoke up Gregory, "but the trouble is he won't go ahead; and his bell wouldn't ring in the water if he did. We've tried him four times already, and every time he has turned round and swum back."

"That's because we didn't go about the matter right, it seems to me, Phil," Jess answered. "Ball's none too fond of water anyhow, and after he swims out a good piece, the river looks so wide that he gets discouraged and turns back. And the chances are he'll keep doing that as long as he can. But he leads like

a horse, and my plan is to lead him across, and carry the bell myself, and keep it ringing."

"How could you lead him, Jess?" inquired Burgess, eagerly.

"Why, I'll ride a horse, and swim across ahead of the cattle."

"Too risky — altogether too risky," pronounced Gregory. "That's a dangerous stream, high and wide and swift as it is just now. I'm well satisfied to stay close to the bank. And I'd be ten times better satisfied to stay on the bank. You'll have to think of something safer than that."

"I doubt if the river is as dangerous as it looks," Jess answered. "Running water is rather easier to swim than still water. Or at least it has always seemed so to me."

"Well, it's certainly a long distance for a horse to swim with a man on his back," remarked Burgess, thoughtfully. "If you had a canoe to paddle across in, it wouldn't be so bad. I'm anxious to reach the north bank, and that at the earliest minute possible. But I don't want any of us to risk our lives."

In spite of what he said, it was evident that he was inclined to favor the plan.

"I can't see that there'll be any very serious risk," urged Jess. "The river is wide and rather swift — I know that. But we've got several horses that can swim it and carry me. That long-legged Spanish fellow can do it and never draw a long breath. He's a vicious rascal, old Jack is, but he can kill two or three

ordinary horses with work. One day last week I rode him hard all the forenoon, and when I turned him loose at dinner-time he went off kicking up his heels like a playful colt."

"Yes, I saw that," laughed Gregory. "If you try to swim the river, Jack's the very nag to swim it on."

The discussion lasted at least an hour, the outcome being an agreement that Jess should carry out, or attempt to carry out, his plan.

About ten o'clock the Bar-Circle drove, led by old Ball, the red, one-horned bell-steer, marched down to the river again. Jess, mounted on the vicious-looking Spanish horse, rode near the forward end of the long-strung-out drove till he came to the river-bank; or at least to the water's edge. The river was out of its banks — far out of its banks — at the place where they proposed to cross.

Ball and the other lead-steers halted a few yards from the water. Dismounting, Jess walked up to Ball, who was very gentle, and fastened the end of his lariat around the steer's head, under one horn and the stub of the other. Now he unbuckled the bell-collar and, after buckling it again, hung the big bell on his arm. The mustang pranced and capered about, rearing and running backwards and sidewise, when Jess leaped into the saddle with the ringing bell on his arm. But the young rider kept his seat easily and the horse soon quieted down.

While waiting for the rest of the cattle and the other drivers to arrive, Jess sat in his saddle, gazing

out across the murky, swift-flowing river. A dull, angry muttering rose from it ceaselessly. It appeared frightfully wide to swim, but he had abundant faith in the endurance of the tough old mustang. Far out toward the middle of the river a snag stuck up out of the water, and on the end of it stood a long-legged crane, meditating and digesting his breakfast. So motionless did the fowl stand that it seemed to have grown out of the snag. Every day since the Bar-Circlers had been trying to cross the river, Jess had noticed the same or a similar crane sitting on the same snag.

The young cowboy was still gazing out across the water when a flotilla of canoes, seven in number, was seen coming up the river. Each canoe was manned by two Indians, who stood erect as they dipped their paddles together, first on one side and then on the other. In spite of their civilized garb, the Indians were rather wild-looking, with their dark faces, and with their black hair hanging to their shoulders or lower. The canoes moved swiftly up the middle of the stream, one behind another. Half a mile above they turned and headed for the south bank.

"Wonder where they're going now?" Jess remarked to Sam Patterson, who had just arrived.

"There's another drove moving toward the river," Sam answered. "It's those people from Illinois, I think. Guess they're going to cross up there somewhere. They've been waiting here nearly three weeks for those canoes — so one of their hands told me.

Great pity we can't get a few Creeks to give us a lift."

"We could get them by waiting for our turn, but I doubt if we need them now, Sam. If I can lead old Ball across, the rest of the cattle will come tagging along behind. I haven't the slightest doubt of that."

"Do you feel sure that old slim-shanks can make it across with you?" inquired the half-breed, eying the horse doubtfully.

"Sure enough to give him a trial, Sam."

"I'd rather it was you tried him than me," answered the other, with a shrug of his shoulders.

The stream of cattle had kept pouring out of the woods and accumulating near the water's edge, till at length the whole of the Bar-Circle drove was waiting by the stream. Soon Burgess was seen galloping around the drove. On coming within hailing distance, he reined up.

"Put in, Jess, whenever you're ready!" he shouted.

Jess looped Ball's lariat around the saddle-horn, started the bell to ringing, and then rode down the few yards of sloping ground to the water. The mustang stopped short at the water's edge, smelt of the muddy stuff, and then snorted loudly and suspiciously, as he tried to turn back. But his resolute rider partly coaxed and partly drove him into the stream.

Ball led well enough till he came to the water's edge. There he, too, stopped obstinately, and all Jess's pulling and tugging failed to budge him, till Sam rode up, flourishing and cracking his whip. Then the steer took the water and followed Jess, giving no

further trouble. Soon the whole drove, urged on by whips and shouts, were pouring into the stream after him.

The river proved rather shallow here, the bottom being overflowed land. The first fifty yards found the horse in water only up to the stirrups, the second fifty up to the saddle-skirts. A little later both he and Ball began to swim.

About this time Jess heard another chorus of shouts and cracking whips, fainter than those behind him. Glancing up stream, he saw another drove of cattle on the bank, ready to enter the water. The Creek canoemen had already ranged themselves out in the river, above and below the cattle — most of them below.

But little time had the cowboy to look about. Several hundred of his own drove were already in the water, and the others were fast being pushed in. Ball was but a few feet behind Jess's horse, and the foremost steers were but a few yards behind Ball. Jess was careful to keep the bell ringing. He headed the mustang straight across; but he knew that the current would carry all the swimming animals down stream, so that they would pass near the snag and its motionless crane.

Now for the first time Jess became aware of something peculiar in the movements of his horse.

"Jack, you rascal, what under the sun are you up to?" he exclaimed, impatiently.

The water was still not very deep, and Jess soon

made the discovery that the mustang, instead of swimming as a horse usually does, was swimming with his fore feet only, and walking on the bottom with his hind feet.

"All right, old fellow, if you like that better," said the cowboy aloud, half amused. "Maybe you find it easier that way. But if the river gets as deep as they say it is between here and the far bank, you'll have a hard job keeping that up all the way across, I'm thinking."

By this time they were far out in the river and were approaching the snag. The stream was fast growing deeper; and as the willful mustang refused to abandon his unique mode of navigation, the water was soon around his rider's waist. Nor did it stop there.

As the river deepened, the horse's position gradually approached the vertical, until Jess had to cling to the saddle-horn with one hand to keep from slipping out of the saddle. Presently the horse stepped into a deeper place and went almost under. When his hind feet did touch bottom, he gave a sudden bound and shot upward, till more than half his length was out of the water. As he came up, snorting the water out of his nostrils, his wildly pawing fore feet churned the river to foam.

"Jack, you old Spanish freak, why don't you swim like a horse ought to swim?" exclaimed the cowboy, angrily. He wanted to jerk the reins, but dared not, for fear of pulling the horse over backwards.

But when the mustang sank down again till the

water was up to his rider's arms, Jess brought his spurred heels sharply against the animal's flanks. Instantly Jack gave a terrific bound, pawing and snorting, and shot up so high that he seemed about to fly away. But he quickly dropped back, as deep as before.

Half a dozen times at least the horse shot up and sank down again, and all his rider's efforts to make him swim seemed only to render him worse. Jess was frightened.

"Why did I ever ride such a crazy beast?" he exclaimed, angrily. And soon he added to himself: "I'd better get him out of here if I can, or he'll be coming back on top of me!"

But on glancing behind him he saw, with a sinking of the heart, that the way of retreat was already closed. He was not only far out in the river, but all those twenty-five hundred steers were now in the water, between him and the bank he had started from. And between him and the north bank flowed two-thirds of the river, the deepest, swiftest part.

There was little time to think; for the perverse mustang was still at his wild capers, letting himself down till his hind feet touched bottom, and then coming up, snorting and pawing. Every time he shot upward he also lunged forward. Soon the slack rope became taut, and the towing bell-steer's head received a violent jerk.

Now Jess hastily untied the lariat from around the saddle horn, and hung the bell there instead. He also

wrapped the lariat around his hand, lest it should be jerked away from him.

That was a' mistake, as he quickly learned. For the next time the horse shot up he also swung round so suddenly that the cowboy's right arm bent back till it was almost jerked out of joint at the shoulder. While he was trying to free his hand, the mustang dropped down and came up again, giving Jess's half-dislocated arm another wrench, which hurt him severely. And it would have hurt him worse if his hand had not slipped out of the rope.

But the jerk, occurring when the horse was partly in the air, was sufficient to bring him over backwards. Jess made a hasty spring out of the saddle, and barely escaped being carried down under him. Indeed, he was carried under the water.

Coming up some yards away, he shook the water out of his eyes and looked about him. The mustang had quit his strange antics and was now swimming away down stream, though with much snorting and splashing. The cattle were not many yards behind and still coming. If Jess did not get out of their way, they would be upon him speedily.

The young fellow was a good swimmer, but even at his best he would not have cared to attempt to swim from here to the north bank. And he had already discovered that his right arm, though he could still move it, was little better than no arm. He felt almost helpless in the water.

But one object did he see that held out any hope of

safety; and that was the snag with the crane on it. If he could only reach that before the advancing steers overtook him, all might be well. It was still two or three hundreds yards away, but he struck out toward it as fast as he could, swimming with his left arm.

CHAPTER XV

PERCHED ON THE CRANE'S ROOST

THAT moving line of heads and horns was advancing rapidly. Jess, with his principal arm disabled, did his best, and struggled through the water at fair speed. But the cattle were swimming faster and must soon overtake him. And that snag, his only hope now, looked far away.

Knowing that he could swim better without them, he paused once and tried to get off his boots, but was unable to do so. So he kept on as best he could. While swimming with all his might, he was wondering if he would find the snag fast in its place; and he wondered vaguely what would become of him if it was not fast. As he floundered along, he saw the hitherto motionless crane turn its head and look. Soon it lifted its wings and went flapping away heavily up the river, with its long, pipe-stem legs sticking straight out behind. The cowboy, swimming for his life, looked after it enviously.

Seeing no chance of reaching the snag ahead of the cattle unless he could increase his speed, Jess tried to use his right arm a little. The effort hurt him fearfully, but he kept it up, and it enabled him to get through the water somewhat faster. But when at last he floundered up to the snag, the swimming steers were scarcely a dozen feet behind him.

Clasping the upright log with his uninjured arm, he was overjoyed to find it as immovable, seemingly, as if it had grown there. He had barely time to drag himself up out of the water, when that floating, moving forest of horns closed around the snag under him.

After climbing till above the horns' reach, he stopped to rest and get his breath. The snag stood nearly perpendicular, but leaned a little up stream. Its lower part was smooth, there being neither limb nor knot to grasp; and the arm that clasped it soon began to ache from weariness.

Looking skyward, Jess saw that the upper end was a wide fork. Realizing that it would be impossible for him to cling to the smooth log very long, he began to climb.

With his right arm paining him sharply every time he tried to use it, the climbing proved very hard. But by clasping the log with his legs, he worked his way up, a few inches at a time, and at length was sitting in the fork, ten or twelve feet above the water.

From this elevation he had an open view in every direction, and could see what was going on. The cattle, crowded together in the water, completely covered many acres of the river's surface. They had advanced a hundred yards or so beyond the snag; but old Ball, their leader, had turned back, and the whole drove was now at a standstill and in confusion. Most of the steers were swimming round and round, in a lost, helpless way, and bawling, bawling drearily all the time. The riderless mustang, after swimming and

drifting a few hundred yards down the river, had turned, below the cattle, and was making back toward the south bank.

"You tricky old rascal! You can swim well enough, now that you want to!" exclaimed Jess. "Guess you did that just to get me off!"

This was his angry conclusion at the time. Later he wondered if he had done the horse an injustice. As afterwards came out, Jack, fine traveler on solid ground and hardy though he was, was naturally a sorry swimmer. Perhaps he was afraid to try to swim with a man on his back. At any rate, neither Jess nor anybody else ever cared to try him in deep water again.

Behind the floating drove of cattle all the hands and two of the owners, Gregory and Johnson, had swum their horses out into the river, and with voices and whips had been pushing the cattle before them. Now, however, they were more concerned about Jess than about the steers. They had not seen all that happened to him, but they had witnessed some of the wild capers of his horse, and could see the animal swimming back with an empty saddle.

From the safety of his perch on the crane's roost, Jess waved his hand at them reassuringly, and made them understand that he was all right.

Once more the drivers began to push and prod the cattle in the rear, trying to force them to move on. But as long as the drove had no leader, and those in front kept swimming round and round, it seemed a hopeless undertaking.

Up the river, the cowboy on the snag could see, that other drove of cattle, guided by a lane of canoes and canoemen, was making fair progress, though the leaders were not yet half-way across.

While Jess was sitting on the crane's perch, gazing around, and wondering how his own drove could be made to move on, several steers got jammed together at the foot of the snag. In their struggles to free themselves, one of them pushed violently against the upright log. To the consternation of the young fellow perched on top of it, the snag moved several inches, leaning further toward the water. It was fast only in the sand of the river-bed, and the push from the swimming steer, added to the cowboy's weight, had been hard enough to loosen it.

For several moments Jess actually held his breath, and in his fright he tried to lighten himself, lest the snag should go down and leave him floundering and struggling among those horns — those clicking, clashing, thick-tangled horns.

But the snag moved no further, and Jess soon dared to breathe again, though he did not dare to move.

This feeling of even partial security was short-lived. The swimming steers were crowded together around the snag, and soon one of them rubbed against it again. And again it settled an inch or two, leaning further up stream! A feeling almost of horror thrilled through the young cowboy.

Indeed, Jess was badly frightened. For he knew well enough that unless the cattle moved on they would

soon have him down among them. Sam Patterson had swum his horse out further than the other cowboys, and Jess now lifted up his voice above the ceaseless bawling and shouted:

"Punch them along if you can, Sam! This old snag's about to turn loose with me! It can't stand much longer!"

Sam quickly shouted the nature of Jess's peril to the other drivers. Then he yelled back:

"Hang on a few minutes if you can, Jess, and I'll try to swim in and take you out!"

He began to urge his horse among the cattle, but Jess waved him back.

"Don't try it, Sam!" he shouted. "It's too dangerous! You can't get through, and if you did your horse couldn't swim with both of us! Push the cattle along if you can, but keep out!"

Again the swimming drivers flourished and cracked their whips and shouted, doing their utmost to get the drove in motion. But soon their noise was drowned by a louder chorus of screeches and yells up the river. The drove crossing above, which numbered thirty-two hundred, had made a turn, and in spite of the canoes was sweeping down stream, toward the Bar-Circle cattle, with a rush!

All in vain the Creek canoemen fought to stem that living tide! They whooped, they yelled, they screeched, as their forefathers must have whooped and yelled and screeched when rushing into battle! They flourished their paddles wildly, they beat the water,

they shot their canoes back and forth! But that horned torrent swept on resistlessly, and the Indians soon had to retreat before it to keep from being run down.

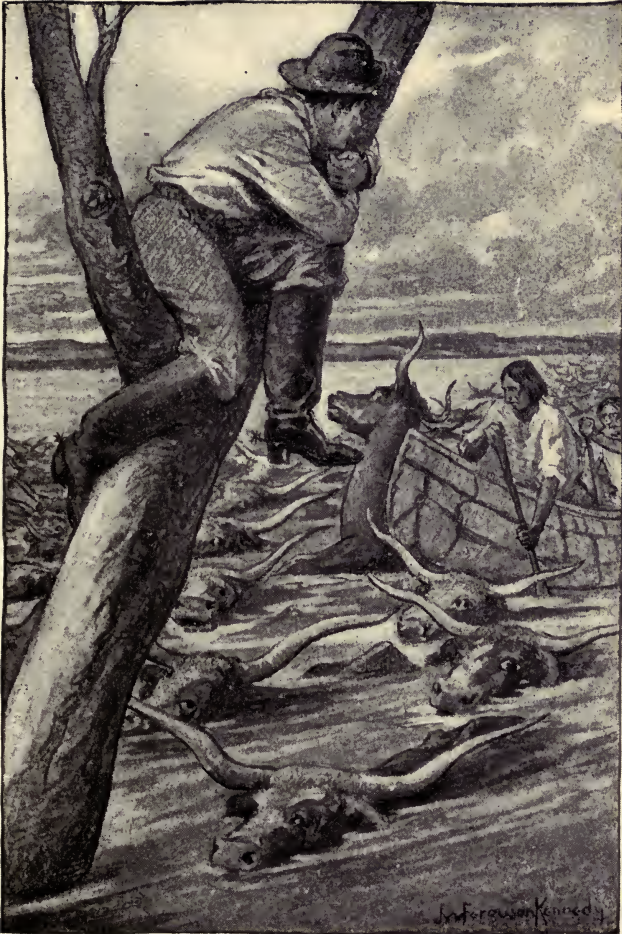
Soon the two droves in the river were together, most of the upper drove passing to the south of the lower one. There were now fifty-seven hundred head of swimming steers in one drove. To the frightened Jess, perched high on his snag in their midst, the whole river seemed to be flowing with heads and horns! The uproar, too, was something frightful; for in their hopeless bewilderment every steer was doing his best to outbawl all the others.

Over to the north of the cattle, two hundred yards or more away, three canoes were coming down the river at a gallop, to get below the mingled droves. At least their movements suggested galloping; for at every powerful sweep of its two paddles each canoe not only shot forward, but rocked so far to one side that it seemed a miracle the paddlers were not pitched out.

While Jess sat watching the Indians, another steer rubbed against his snag, causing it to settle a few inches lower, and reminding him of his peril. Every nerve in his body seemed to tingle with horror.

"Hello there!" he suddenly yelled to the hindmost pair of Creeks. And when their paddles had stopped he shouted: "This old log is about to flop down with me! Can't you come in here and take me off?"

The Indians made no reply, and he wondered if



AFTER ADVANCING A FEW YARDS — THE CANOE WAS SEEN TO
COME TO A STANDSTILL.

they understood English. The canoe stood still, and for a minute or two the Creeks could be seen gazing toward the snag and talking together. At length they turned and began to paddle toward the cattle and toward the snag.

Soon they could be seen trying to thread their way among the crowded heads and tangled horns. Jess, knowing well that his treacherous perch was likely to drop down with him at any moment, watched their slow progress with painful anxiety.

The rear Indian was propelling the canoe, while the one in front kept punching right and left with his paddle to open a way. After advancing a few yards among the swimming cattle, the canoe was seen to come to a standstill. A little later it made a lurch forward, and must have run upon a steer's back. For both canoe and Indians suddenly rose up in the air, stood for a moment, then over they went!

During the next few minutes the bitterly disappointed watcher on the snag caught glimpses of a pair of black, bobbing heads, but he could not tell what the Creeks were doing. Probably they were trying to right their overturned canoe. If so, all their efforts were in vain; for he afterwards saw them emerge from among the horns and swim away toward the north bank, pushing their hollow l^og before them.

No help could be expected from that source.

Now Jess felt that his situation was indeed desperate. All the other canoes were far down the river, where they were trying to keep the cattle from drift-

ing on. His friends had been forced to retreat to the south bank. And even if they had known of his dire peril, they could have done nothing to rescue him. Half helpless with his crippled arm as he was, he cast his eyes around despairingly.

It was a fearful situation, and the horror of it was fully realized by the cowboy on the crane's perch. Young as he was, he had been in many places of danger — several of them since starting on this trip. But in not one of them had he found himself so helpless or so hopelessly beset by dangers as on this snag far out in the Arkansas River. The very thought of having to struggle for life among those crowded, half-wild steers filled him with dread.

To make matters worse, if possible, he soon became aware that the snag was settling slowly all the time. The sand that held it was gradually giving way. And every touch the log received from a swimming steer only made it settle the faster. Carefully, cautiously Jess drew off his boots. If the worst came to the worst, he would have a better chance for life with his feet unweighted.

Slowly, slowly, very slowly the snag sank, its motion being felt rather than seen. The horror of the almost imperceptible movement thrilled through Jess as he sat watching and waiting for the inevitable.

His acute torture was soon cut short. Another steer rubbed against the snag, and the next moment both snag and cowboy plunged into the water!

The log came down across the backs of several

steers, and their terrified struggles and bellowings caused a panic for yards around. But the steers quickly floundered from under, and the water-soaked snag sank like lead to the bottom.

Now the half-helpless cowboy was in the river, among the swimming, struggling, bawling, fear-maddened cattle!

CHAPTER XVI

TAILING THE BELL-STEER

INSTINCTIVELY Jess, when the log sank from under him, clutched at the first object within his reach, which happened to be a steer's tail. The already excited animal, a wild one, turned his head, rolled one eye back, and catching sight of the cowboy, uttered a loud bellow and began a frantic struggle to escape. All that the brute could do was to keep swimming; and that he did, pushing and wedging his way among the crowded cattle. But wherever he went he felt something clutching his tail, and every time he rolled his eye back he caught sight of a human head towing in his wake. Then he swam faster.

Jess clung to the steer's tail desperately with his left hand, while his unwilling, wrathful rescuer kept towing him about among the swimming drove. As Jess passed by the steers' heads, some of them struggled and fought to get away from him. Others did their best to horn him, and he had to splash water into their eyes with his crippled hand.

This went on for several minutes. The harder the wild steer found it to rid himself of his tail-gripping encumbrance, the more determined he was to shake it off. He had worked his way far over toward the east edge of the floating drove, when Jess happened to

catch sight of a familiar head but a foot or two from his own. It had one great horn and a stub, and there was a rope around it.

He recognized Ball instantly. Letting go the wild steer, he swam back and eagerly grasped the gentle one's tail. Ball offered not the slightest objection. Having once been a work-ox he was accustomed to such liberties.

Jess soon got hold of the lariat, which was floating. This gave him an idea. Perhaps he could drive the ox. Ball, he knew, was familiar or had been familiar with the common words of command and, if he had not forgotten them, could be guided by them.

"Get up, Ball!" he shouted, giving the rope a slight jerk.

Ball did not move. He seemed more or less bewildered at first, and could not understand what was expected of him. But after the command, emphasized by the rope-jerking, had been repeated a few times, he started through the swimming drove, picking and pushing his way at his driver's urging.

"Gee, Ball! Gee! gee! gee!" shouted Jess, when he wanted him to turn to the right. And the ox turned obediently. In fact, he turned too far, and the driver had to shout "Haw!" at him a few times to bring him back to the right course. Thus they kept on, and soon the steer and his driver emerged from among the swimming cattle into open water.

Here Ball wanted to turn back, being reluctant to leave the other steers. But the cowboy kept urging

him on, speaking to him sharply, and jerking the rope or twisting his tail. Finally, seeing that there was no help for it, Ball pointed his nose toward the north bank and struck out across the wide expanse of river.

Jess clung to the steer's tail with his right hand. Knowing that Ball had already been in the water long, he swam with his left hand and his feet to keep from burdening him.

Before going far Jess glanced back, and was surprised to see several other steers coming, not many yards to the rear. And still others could be seen falling in behind those. In their bewildered state the cattle were both willing and eager to follow a leader.

By the time Ball had covered half the distance to the north bank, he had hundreds of followers. And when, several minutes later, Jess let go the old fellow's tail, climbed the bank and looked back, all of the two mingled droves were coming.

"It was a success after all, my plan," he said to himself, "though up till a few minutes ago it seemed an utter failure."

Indeed, his plan had proved an entire success — a double success, in fact. He had brought two droves across instead of one.

There was barely time to wave to his friends, who had seen the snag go down and believed him drowned, when he had to retreat before the cattle, which were coming up the bank by hundreds and thousands.

As he sat on the limb of a big fallen tree, sunning himself and watching the dripping steers emerge from

the river, he looked out across the wide expanse of water and saw that a bunch, nearly a hundred head, had broken away from the main drove and were swimming and drifting down the middle of the river. Later he saw them turn and head for the south bank. After reaching and climbing the bank, they disappeared into the woods.

The Indian canoemen came paddling behind the big drove, but not one of the cowboys attempted to swim his horse all the way across. Indeed, as soon as they saw that Jess was safe and that the cattle were crossing, they swam back to land. A little later Jess noticed them riding rapidly up the river-bank. He knew that they were making for the ferry.

Jess sat quietly on his perch in the sun, watching the steers browsing in the woods, till the cowboys came galloping down to take charge of the numerous drove. Not only the Bar-Circle hands, but also those of the other outfit, were in the party. Gregory was leading Jess's horse.

"Bully for you, Jess, my boy!" he shouted, on catching sight of the young fellow. Then, riding up to the log, he said: "You fetched 'em across a-whooping, didn't you?"

"Well, yes, I got 'em across at last, but I had a time of it on the way. If I'd so much as guessed what I'd have to pass through, I never would have started. I left my hat and a good pair of boots somewhere out yonder in the Arkansas."

"Oh, never mind about those!" answered Gregory,

lightly. "Plenty of hats and boots down at Fort Gibson. You shall have new ones, and good ones, too, instead of your old ones. We'll get them the first time we're down there, together with the suit of clothes Burgess promised you. Meanwhile some of us will lend you what you need. There are several extra hats and extra pairs of boots in the wagon."

"It was all this booger's fault that I had so much trouble," Jess remarked, as he took the bridle-rein from Gregory and sprang into the saddle. His clothes were now almost dry. "If he'd behaved himself and swum straight across, he'd have saved me an awful fright. I was scared out of a year's growth out there."

The two sets of cowboys now rounded up their two mingled droves of cattle and marched them out to the prairie. Here they were all soon busy separating the steers according to the road-brands.

After learning that the Bar-Circle cattle had swum the river at last, Davis the teamster and Granny the cook brought the wagon across at the ferry, and established a new camp on the north bank of the Arkansas. Both the wagon and the cattle had been crossed not far above the Verdigris. This latter is a good-sized stream which flows into the Arkansas from the north, its mouth being but a few miles above Fort Gibson.

After the mixed droves had been separated, and the party from Illinois had taken up their march northward with their cattle, Burgess ordered the Bar-Circle drove counted. When the last steer had been passed

between two cowboys, and they and Burgess had compared counts, it was found that the number was about eighty head short.

"Where could all those steers have slipped out?" exclaimed Burgess, impatiently.

Now for the first time Jess recalled that he had noticed a bunch of cattle drifting down the river, and afterwards returning to the south bank. On inquiring, he learned that nobody had brought the run-aways back. Indeed, nobody else had even seen them escaping.

"So that's what became of the sly rascals," said Burgess. "They sneaked back to the south bank, and they're somewhere over there now. That means more trouble. I thought we had every hoof on the north side of the river at last. But that's evidently a mistake."

"I ought to have remembered them sooner," admitted Jess. "But we've been so busy since then that somehow they slipped out of my mind. I'll go back over there right away and see about them. And somebody had better go with me."

It was now late in the day, and there were threatenings of more rain, the sky being overcast with clouds. But it was soon decided that Jess and Gregory should return to the south side of the Arkansas, and remain there till the eighty-odd missing steers were found and brought across. If assistance should be needed, they could send for more men.

So the two set out at once for the ferry, each of

them mounted on one horse and leading two more. They might have plenty of hard riding to do before they found the runaway steers. Jess had borrowed a pair of boots and a hat, and both he and Gregory had their blankets tied behind their saddles.

When at length the flatboat had landed them on the south bank, they started for a cabin that stood out at the edge of the prairie. Both had got slightly acquainted with the Creek Indian living there. Having no camping outfit with them, they were going to see if they could make his house their headquarters while on this side of the river. They had especial need of some place to leave their spare horses.

But before they had ridden far toward the Indian cabin, Jess said:

"Phil, if you can lead all these horses, I'll ride down the river and see if I can get on the trail of those steers. Even if I can't find them, I can learn the course they've followed, and then we may not have to ride all the way back to the river to strike their trail to-morrow morning."

"Don't you think we'd better stay together, Jess? One man might have trouble driving all those steers if he found them."

"Not much chance to find them to-night. We wouldn't have time to ride to that Creek's and then get back to the river before it's too dark to pick up the trail. So if you'll manage the horses, I'll take a little round by myself, and see what I can learn while daylight lasts."

"All right, then. I'll trot on and arrange matters with that Indian. You'd better not stay out late. We can get an early start in the morning, and it won't take us long to run those rascally steers down." He rode away, leading the four horses.

Jess galloped down the river-bank for a mile or two. When near the point where he had seen the cattle go ashore, he rode more slowly, looking for tracks.

Soon he discovered where they had passed. There had been no other cattle here since the last rain, and their tracks were very plain. Away the cowboy went, following the trail at a gallop.

The cattle had entered some scattering timber, and then turned down the river. They were traveling away from the house to which Gregory had gone, but Jess pushed on rapidly after them, hoping to overtake them before night. No telling how far they would wander by morning if they remained at large.

The whole sky was now thickly overcast with clouds; and before the young cowboy suspected that night was near, darkness began to come on. Still hoping to overhaul the cattle at any minute, he kept riding as long as it was possible to follow the trail.

But at last he had to turn back, without finding them. Now he started for the Indian cabin. He rode rapidly for a short distance, till the thickening darkness forced him to drop to a walk to keep from running against trees and bushes.

Before long the moonless, cloudy night became so black that he could not see his hand held an inch in

front of his face. Having a blanket behind his saddle, he was wondering if it would not be better for him to lariat his horse and go to sleep somewhere, when rain, a slow drizzle, began to fall. He untied the blanket and fastened it around his shoulders, but rode on.

Jess's sense of direction was unusually strong; so much so that as long as he could see he never lost the points of the compass. But so thick was the darkness now that he was soon forced to admit to himself that he couldn't tell east from west or north from south. It occurred to him that his horse might be able to find the way, and he gave him the rein. But from the animal's aimless manner it quickly became evident that he either did not know where he was expected to go, or did not care where he went. Soon he stopped and began to graze.

"Well, now, this is a pretty how-do-you-do!" said the cowboy to himself. "I'm hopelessly lost — no doubt of that. And this drizzle bids fair to last all night. I can't tell whether I'm going on to California or back to Texas. And I'm just as likely to ride into the Arkansas River as anywhere else," he added, a little later, when his horse began to splash through water.

The water proved to be only a pond, and after emerging from it he kept going as fast as he dared in the pitchy blackness that shut him in.

After he had been riding for perhaps an hour, wandering whither he knew not, the lost cowboy found

himself in water again. Thinking that it was only another pond, he urged his horse forward. But after splashing along for a few hundred yards, till the water was up to his stirrups, he detected a faint, dull roar. Now he realized that the roar came from running water, and that if not actually in the river he was at least in back-water from the river. He had supposed himself a mile or two from the Arkansas.

The roar of the swollen stream, little more than a muttering, so filled the air that he could not make sure what direction the sound came from. He turned his horse and thought he was retracing his way. But the water soon began to grow deeper. Now the horse stopped short, trembling and snorting, and refused to advance another step. Jess sat still in the saddle, wondering what he ought to do.

"Well, it seems I'm not only lost in the night, but lost in the Arkansas River as well, and can't find my way out!" was his not very cheerful reflection.

CHAPTER XVII

SINGING FROG AND BLUE BUTTERFLY

FOR a few minutes Jess sat quietly in the saddle, not knowing which way to go, and afraid to move lest he should plunge into deeper water. And yet he could not remain here all night.

At length the horse turned of his own accord, and began to make his way through the water. He stopped from time to time, snorting suspiciously, as if uncertain of his course. Jess let him have the rein, and the animal kept going till at length he emerged upon firm ground.

The lost cowboy was willing to let the horse go where he would, in the hope that the animal's instinct might lead him back to their former camp. But scarcely were they out of the water when the horse stopped and, putting down his nose, fell to cropping the grass. So Jess had to take the rein again. He tried to guide him away from the river.

After wandering for an hour or two longer through the drizzle and darkness, Jess discovered a light not far away. Riding slowly toward it through the woods, he soon learned that it shone between the logs of a cabin. The light was rather dim, coming from a wood-fire burnt low.

Riding as close to the cabin as he could for a fence,

he shouted "Hello!" again and again. At first only some noisy dogs rushed out to bark at him. But at length the door opened and a man stood in it. He proved to be an Indian, who spoke very poor English.

Jess finally made known that he was lost, and that he wanted a shelter and a place to sleep. In view of the rainy night, the Indian consented to furnish him lodging, though, as it seemed to Jess, the consent was rather grudgingly given.

The cowboy dismounted, and after lariatting his horse in an open spot, left him to graze there, while he himself took his saddle and started to the house.

The Indian had left the door ajar, so that a streak of light shone out, and he had also stirred the fire till it lighted up the cabin's interior. Jess entered and put his saddle in a corner, then looked about him.

The cabin was small and smoke-begrimed and had but one room. There were two beds in it, in the back corners. One bed the Indian and his wife slept in; the other had several little Indians in it. The man was about to lift the sleeping children out to make a place for the young white man to sleep. But Jess told him not to do that, as he would be only too glad to sleep on the floor by the fire, rolled in his blanket.

The Indian compromised the matter by crowding the children together on the back part of their bed, thus leaving room for Jess to sleep on the fore side.

And that was what he did, undressing in the dark, after the owner of the cabin had shoveled ashes upon

the fire with a clapboard. Jess laid both his clothes and his six-shooter on a chair by the bed. He was not very favorably impressed by the Indian's appearance, and felt safer for having a weapon within reach.

For a short time the young white man lay listening to the breathing of the little sleeping Indians in bed with him, and to the steady, gentle pattering of the rain upon the roof. Then, before realizing that he was even sleepy, he fell asleep.

How long he slept is uncertain; but some time in the night he was awakened by a loud, noisy pounding on the door. Again and again the pounding was heard. The owner of the cabin was evidently a sound sleeper, but he finally awoke, crawled out of bed and into his clothes, and went to the door. There Jess heard him parleying, in his own tongue, with whoever was outside. Soon several men came in. When the fire was stirred up, Jess saw that they were all Indians, and that every one carried a gun.

The coming of a party of armed Indians at this time of night was not very reassuring, and Jess found his hand slipping out, almost involuntarily, to the six-shooter on the chair, and drawing it under the cover to him. The Indians soon began to talk loudly and excitedly. And it seemed that he himself had something to do with their conversation, for they kept glancing back toward where he was lying.

Presently came another knocking at the cabin door, and when it was opened, four more armed Indians

entered. And scarcely fifteen minutes later several others arrived. All wore blankets, and all remained standing. The cabin was now almost as full as it would hold, of armed men.

With every new arrival Jess felt more and more uncomfortable. That all these Indians were not out this rainy night, and at this time of night, for any good purpose, he understood well enough. But what they were here for he could not even guess.

The situation was certainly a puzzling one to the cowboy, lying there quietly with the sleeping children. The roomful of armed Indians looked very fierce to him, in the dim, shadowy light from the glowing coals. Several of the visitors seemed to be urging something, and the owner of the cabin kept objecting. At last the owner had his way, and the numerous armed visitors passed out into the darkness and drizzle from which they had come.

Though he had no real reason to suspect that any danger had threatened him, Jess breathed more freely after they were gone. He inquired of the Creek what they were doing out at this time of night. But the man either did not understand, or pretended not to understand, what was said to him, and no explanation was given.

The Indian covered up the fire and went back to bed. Jess soon fell asleep and slept, though rather lightly, till daylight. Then he got out of bed and dressed, paid the Indian for his lodging, and took his saddle and went out. He more than half expected to

find his horse gone, but the animal was still tied to a bush, cropping the grass busily.

Jess girted on his saddle and was quickly riding away. Some little rain was still falling, but it ceased before he had covered the few miles to the house where Phil Gregory was waiting for him.

"Well, now, where in the world have you been all this rainy night?" demanded Gregory, as Jess rode up to the Creek's cabin.

The returned wanderer gave a full account of the night's adventures. After unsaddling and lariatting out his horse, he and Gregory entered the house for breakfast.

There were two rooms here, with a door between. The Creek woman was very shy, staying much of the time out of sight in the kitchen. At the most she only came to the partition-door and glanced in bashfully at the table where the white men were eating. Gregory explained that she spoke not a word of English.

The table was waited on by her daughters, two demure little brown-faced maids of fifteen or sixteen years. They looked enough alike to be twins, and Jess soon learned that they were twins. Both were bright-faced and rather pretty. They knew a little English, and spoke it in a way that Jess and Gregory found very amusing.

Gregory, having spent the night here, had learned something about them. The prettier of the girls was named Singing Frog, and her sister, Blue Butterfly. Gregory was careful not to speak of them while they

were in the room. But in some way they learned that they were being talked about, and could be seen peeping shyly, bashfully between the logs of the partition-wall.

While eating, Jess told Gregory of the gathering of armed Indians the night before, and Gregory was as much puzzled to know what it had meant as Jess himself had been. The Creek, who was out looking for his horses, returned before the white men had finished their breakfast. He inquired where Jess had spent the night and, on being told, remarked:

“Bad Creek live there. Me no likee that kind Injun. Heap much devilment go on there.”

This confirmed Jess's already formed opinion that the midnight assemblage had not been for any good purpose. But he was still in the dark as to what had really brought the armed red men together.

Soon after breakfast Jess and Gregory saddled a horse apiece, Jess choosing one that he had not been riding. Then, having lariatied their other horses on fresh grass, and asked the Creek to take care of them, they rode away in quest of the runaway cattle.

After riding down the river, and somewhat toward it, till they intercepted the trail of the steers, they followed it, and at length came to where night had forced Jess to turn back. The trail was somewhat dim after the drizzle of the night before, but it could still be made out.

To Jess's no small surprise, the trail led not far from the cabin where he had spent the night. And

less than half a mile further on it showed that the steers had been penned in a rail-pen in the woods. Jess recalled that he had heard the distant bawling of cattle during the night, and he and Gregory wondered still more. The pen was empty now, and the trail led on down the river.

Finally the two men rode back to the cabin and demanded an explanation. For a time the Indian took refuge in his ignorance of English. He finally admitted knowing that the cattle had been there, but he insisted that he knew nothing as to whose they were or how they came there, the pen not belonging to him.

Whether this was true or not, the white men had to accept it. So they rode back to the pen and took up the trail. Before following it far, they discovered horses' tracks among the cattle-tracks — pretty good evidence that the wandering bunch of steers had had drivers, at least from here on.

"I don't like the looks of this, Jess," said Gregory, as they were riding the trail. "These steers are stolen — not much doubt about that. And if we've got to deal with thieves, I'm not sure it wouldn't have been wiser for us to go back for some of the other boys."

"Well, as there are the tracks of only two horses, there can't be more than two thieves," answered Jess. "They won't be so very bold, I guess, here almost in rifle-shot of a fort full of soldiers. I don't think we need to be afraid of them. If we overtake them with our cattle, we'll get the cattle or have a lot of fun."

"Yes, I think we can manage the two, Jess. But they're liable to get re-enforcements before they travel many miles. We can keep on after them till they do, though."

So the two white men kept on, riding hard. Late in the afternoon they came upon their cattle, grazing on a little prairie shut in by thick woods. The horse-tracks had continued even to this point. But if there had been any persons watching the cattle, they had disappeared before the white men could catch a glimpse of them.

Gregory expressed the conviction of both when, after thinking the matter over, he said:

"These cattle were driven off — not the least doubt of that in my mind. But the fellows that stole them intended, not to keep them, but to bring them back as soon as a reward is offered."

"Well, we'll save them that trouble, and ourselves from paying a reward," laughed Jess.

Rounding up the more than eighty steers, the two men promptly started back the way they had come. When night overtook them, they stopped at the house of an Indian where there was also a cow-pen large enough to hold the cattle. Gregory and Jess got their supper at the house, but, the sky being clear to-night, they slept in their blankets not far from the penned cattle, and still closer to their lariated horses. They did not dare to run any more risk from thieves; and there was no knowing whom to trust here.

At daylight the cattle were turned out to graze for

an hour or two. And at the end of that time Gregory and Jess saddled up and drove on. They had still about twenty miles to travel, and it was late in the day when they arrived at the Indian cabin where they had left their other horses.

They had had not a bite of dinner, and both were very hungry. On going to the house to see if they could get something to eat, they found nobody at home but the two girls, Singing Frog and Blue Butterfly. The girls informed the white men that their mother had gone visiting at another Creek's, and was not expected home till late.

"Well, there's nothing for us but to tough it out till supper, I guess," Gregory remarked, with a hungry sigh.

"That seems to be the only chance," answered Jess.

But here the two shy little Creek girls found courage to speak up:

"I cooka you something. I cooka you bread — nice bread," proposed Singing Frog.

"Blue Butterfly cooka you egg — two egg — more egg," announced her sister.

"Singing Frog cooka you bake — how you say it?" The girl made a motion as of turning something with a fork, and then a sizzling, frying sound with her lips, and the white men understood that she referred to frying bacon.

"Well, if you will, you girls shall have something pretty the first time I go to Fort Gibson," Gregory assured them.

At this the two little brown faces fairly shone with expectancy.

"Blue Butterfly cooka you chick," declared that little maid. She meant chicken.

The two girls now set to work eagerly to prepare the meal. Soon a fire could be heard crackling in the kitchen fireplace, and various sounds from that room told the hungry men that cooking was under way.

When at length the meal was on the table, it was found to be surprisingly good, especially for men with sharp appetites. And the two little Indians glowed with pride at the praises their cooking received. They hovered about constantly, asking again and again if their guests would not like some of this or that. Singing Frog had taken Jess under her special care, and Blue Butterfly looked after Gregory.

The father of the girls came home while the white men were eating. Gregory and Jess spent the night there, grazing the cattle till dark, and then penning them. Next morning they hired the Creek to herd the cattle for a half-day, while they themselves paid a visit to Fort Gibson. Burgess was staying down there now, and Johnson went down every day. They were buying supplies, and looking after their outfitting preparations. Gregory went down to consult with his partners, and Jess because he had not yet visited the fort.

When they returned they brought some presents for the children, as they called the two little Creek girls. Knowing the Indian fondness for gaudy colors — even the men wore coats as gorgeous as a rainbow every

Sunday — they brought each of the girls, among other things, a handkerchief that was startling in the brilliancy of its hues. And they were soon rewarded by seeing the girls peeping around the sides of the partition-door with their handkerchiefs on their necks.

“Well, the next thing now is to get those steers across,” Gregory remarked.

“Yes,” answered Jess, “and if I don’t miss my guess we’re going to have a time of it with the rogues.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE PONIES FOR A WIFE

LATE that afternoon Gregory rode up to the ferry and crossed over to the other side of the river, to visit the camp there. He returned after dark. And on the following morning Sam Patterson the half-breed, Soos the Mexican, and Hawk Tail the Choctaw, came over to help get the eighty steers across.

First the cattle were driven down to the river and forced into the water, the cowboys swimming their horses after them. The steers swam out a short distance, then turned and pointed their noses down stream, as they had done before. Drivers on the bank followed them, and for a time would not let them come out. But the long-horned fellows obstinately refused to swim across, and finally they were allowed to land on the south bank.

After resting a short while, they were driven up to the original starting place and there put into the water again. But it was only to repeat what they had done before. And yet a third time they were tried, with exactly the same result.

The sun was now low, and the bothersome steers were driven back to the prairie and grazed a while, then taken to the Creek's and penned. Jess and Gregory spent the night with the Indian, but the other

hands crossed back to their camp. The day had been bright and clear, and everything indicated that at last the rainy season was at an end.

Early on the following morning the three helpers came over again, and again the cattle were driven down to the river, this time to the ferry. An attempt would be made to ferry them across.

The open end of the flatboat was drawn up against the bank, and about twenty steers, cut out from the main bunch, were driven down to the boat. But no sooner did the skittish brutes hear the sound of boards under their feet than they took fright and broke away.

When this had been repeated several times, at last nearly a dozen of them were forced upon the boat. Then the end-boards were put up to shut them in, the ferryman took his place, and the boat moved away toward the north bank.

But when about a hundred yards out on the swollen stream, the steers took fright at something, probably their strange situation, and all made a sudden rush together toward the landward end of the boat. The planks were strong and held fast, but they were not very high, and the cattle jumped over them, plunging into the river. They swam straight to land.

This plan, too, had proved a failure, and the cowboys held a consultation. It was soon decided to send for the yoke-cattle, to be used in getting the rebels across.

So the six oxen that pulled the wagon were brought over on the ferry-boat. Then the wild steers were

roped, one at a time, and each one was dragged up and necked to a gentle ox. In this way six of the wild fellows were forced upon the boat and ferried across.

Then the oxen were brought back, and six more of the rebellious animals were flatboated over in the same way.

This method was proving effective enough, but was very slow, each round trip occupying an hour or longer. So the men soon decided that they must take more cattle at each trip.

After six steers had been necked to work-oxen and driven aboard, others were roped, thrown down and, with their feet tied together, were dragged upon the flatboat. There they were left lying till the boat reached the north bank, when they were released and driven away to the herd.

These two methods, hard though they were, proved so effective that before night all the eighty-odd rebels had been ferried to the north bank and were safe among the other cattle.

After the last boat-load of steers had started across, Gregory and Jess rode back to the Creek's to get their other horses and pay for their lodging.

When the Indian had told them how much he charged, Gregory paid him more than the amount named, and Jess handed him a coin as a present for little Singing Frog. The Indian seemed much impressed by their liberality, and very favorably impressed with the white men themselves. Indeed, even before this he had grown very friendly.

"You likee Creeks' country?" he suddenly demanded of Jess.

"Yes, I do that. It's a fine country. Believe I'd like to live here," was the incautious reply.

"You likee live here, eh?"

"Yes, I'm pretty sure I would," answered the young cowboy, truthfully.

"You likee my little Singy Frog?"

"Yes, I certainly do," replied the unsuspecting Jess, heartily. "She's the prettiest, nicest little thing I know. And I'm going to send her some —"

"Then you gif me one, two, three pony, I gif you little Singy Frog. Her be your squaw. You keepee her all time always, same like I keepee my squaw."

The look on Jess's face, of mingled astonishment and dismay, was, as Gregory afterwards declared, one well worth seeing. And the young fellow blushed like a school-girl when he realized what this was — an offer of marriage.

"That child!" was all he could think of to say.

"Singy Frog tink you likee her. Singy Frog likee you; want to be your squaw all time always," explained the Creek. "You gif me one, two, three pony, you takee Singy Frog, keepee Singy Frog all time always; long you live, Singy Frog live."

Jess looked despairingly at Gregory. Phil's eyes were laughing, but there was only a slight smile on his lips. He was a gentleman, and though he doubtless felt a strong inclination to laugh aloud, politeness restrained him. The Indian customs differed from the

white man's customs; and there was no reason that this honest offer should be treated with disrespect, or the Creek's feelings hurt.

"But I don't own three ponies," answered Jess, jumping at the only door of escape that he could see.

"Yes, you got one, two, three pony," persisted the Indian, pointing to the three horses he had seen Jess hitch to the yard-fence.

"But they're not mine; they're his." Jess pointed triumphantly to Gregory.

"You likee my little Boo Blutterfy?" demanded the Creek, as he turned hopefully to the owner of the horses.

"Yes, but —" began the surprised white man.

"You gif me one, two, three pony, you takee Boo Blutterfy. Her be your squaw all time always."

Gregory was so astonished that at first he could think of nothing to say, and the Creek quickly turned to Jess again.

"How much pony you got?" he demanded.

"One — only one."

"You gif me one pony now, you takee Singy Frog. Some udder time you gif me one pony more, two pony more."

Then he added, by way of clinching the matter:

"Me likee you, me likee him. Me likee all good white people; good white people all likee me." He smiled blandly.

Gregory had had time to recover from his astonishment, and he now came to Jess's relief.

"My friend here is too young to get married," he explained. "Too young — too young — too young — just a boy," he added, when the Creek seemed not to understand.

Then he explained that both he and Jess were on a journey of thousands of miles, and could not think of taking wives with them. He assured the Creek that his daughters were worth at least twenty ponies apiece. He also assured him that if he and Jess ever came back here to live with the Indians and marry Indian wives, they would choose Singing Frog and Blue Butterfly in preference to any others.

The Creek was evidently disappointed, but he seemed satisfied with the explanation.

While this conversation was in progress, Jess and Gregory had both been conscious of bright black eyes peeping at them from between the logs of the partition-wall. But while Gregory was explaining, Jess caught sight of two little bare-footed, bare-headed figures running from the house toward the woods. The shy little red maids had understood enough to know that their father's offer was rejected, and they were making for the brush to hide their shame and confusion.

As the two white men were about to ride away, Gregory told the Creek to be sure to come down to Fort Gibson next day. And while riding toward the river he said:

"Now, Jess, we've got to spend some money. We're simply bound to send those nice little girls some

presents that will more than console them for not getting white husbands."

"That's right," agreed Jess, heartily. "And let's keep this whole affair dark. I don't care to have all the boys laughing at us and teasing us. We'll never hear the last of it if we don't."

"No, we sha'n't. And as our Creek friends treated us very nicely while we stayed with them, we can't afford to have them ridiculed. So we'll keep this whole matter between ourselves."

And that was just what they did. Next day they rode down to the fort, where they bought several presents — Indian finery — and sent them to Singing Frog and Blue Butterfly by the girls' father. The girls themselves they did not see again. Long, long afterwards Jess, gazing back dim-eyed through more than fifty years, would say:

"Nice little Singing Frog! She was a pretty little girl if she was red. I hope she brought her father many ponies and found a good husband. That was the only offer of marriage I've ever had."

Both Jess and Gregory were curious to know what that midnight gathering of armed Indians that Jess had witnessed had meant. They made inquiries while in the fort, and afterwards in the country as they were riding about, but nobody seemed able to suggest a satisfactory explanation. Every person they talked with agreed that the Indians must have been out on some business of a questionable kind, but what that business was Jess never learned.

After turning over the presents to the Creek, and attending to such other business as they had in the fort, Jess and Gregory mounted their horses and started back to camp. Fort Gibson stood a mile or more from the Arkansas, on the bank of a tributary stream known here as Grand River, but further up as the Neosho. Returning to camp, they had to cross both this stream and the Verdigris. Grand River was fordable, but the Verdigris had to be swum. The road led up the north bank of the Arkansas.

When about a mile from the fort, Gregory and Jess noticed a saddled and bridled horse grazing not many yards from the road-side. They recognized the animal as one of their own, and looked to see who had ridden him.

In the shade of an elm they soon discovered a man, lying with his hat over his face. He seemed to be asleep. They recognized the Deserter.

"Hello, General! What you doing here?" Gregory called out, as the two rode up to where the former soldier was sprawled on the ground. "Are you sick?" he added, when the man made no reply.

The Deserter neither moved nor spoke, and Jess dismounted to learn what was the matter. A nearly empty whisky-bottle protruding from the fellow's pocket told that he was drunk.

"Well, now, doesn't that beat you?" exclaimed Gregory. "Wonder where the poor fool got any money. I didn't think he had enough to buy a bottle of snake-juice."

As they afterwards learned, the Deserter had persuaded Burgess to advance him money to buy some things he would need on the long journey to California, particularly a gun. But the former soldier did not get as far as the fort. Meeting a whisky-peddler somewhere on the way, he exchanged his last dollar for liquor and was soon past traveling.

Gregory was disgusted. "We'll fix Mr. Deserter!" he announced. And when they rode on they were leading the intoxicated man's horse.

"We're leaving him here between two rivers," laughed Jess. "He can't cross the Verdigris without swimming, nor Grand River without deep wading, and he won't be likely to do either. So we're not apt to set eyes on him again."

"-It would only be a good riddance," answered Gregory. "That's what I've told Burgess time and again. He'd be glad enough to let the fellow go if there were plenty of hands; but he thinks we can use him for a teamster from here on. I tell him that a hand that can't be depended on is just a little worse than nobody."

"The chances are that he would desert if we ever got into some tight place, where we needed him badly."

"So I've suggested to Burgess," Gregory said. "But he insists that the fellow won't dare desert after we get a few days' travel from Fort Gibson; that he would die in the wilderness if he did."

But they had not got rid of the Deserter yet — far from it. Some time the following day he slouched into

camp, looking much the worse for his drunken debauch. He explained that he had swum the Verdigris. Gregory gave him to understand that he was not needed any more, but the fellow remained in camp, insisting that he was waiting to see Burgess again.

"It'll be just like Joe to tell him he can stay," Gregory said to Jess. "And if he does, my word for it we shall have trouble with the tricky rascal before we're done with him."

He was right. Hands proved to be scarce here, especially reliable ones. The first time Burgess returned to camp from the fort, he had a talk with the former soldier. Finally, after exacting some pledges of good conduct, he agreed to keep him for one of their teamsters.

"We know just how worthless this fellow is, and that's more than we can say of any new man we may hire," was Burgess's philosophic way of looking at the matter, when Gregory protested. And, as usual, Burgess had his way.

Gregory's prediction that the Deserter would cause the outfit trouble was also fulfilled. But that did not come till a good while later.

CHAPTER XIX

OUTFITTING FOR THE WILDERNESS

WHILE Burgess and Johnson were down at the fort, laying in supplies, Gregory and Jess were left in charge of the camp and the cattle. They were not at all busy, and every day one of them rode down to the fort.

One morning Jess started up the river for a ride, and to look at the country. After going about three miles, he discovered a wagon-train camped in some open woods. He changed his course so as to pass through the camp. There were sixty or seventy wagons, scattered over many acres.

Scarcely had he entered the camp when a masculine voice called out:

"Hello, there, young man! What are you doing here?"

Jess turned instantly, and was much surprised to see Adams walking out to meet him. They greeted each other heartily, and Jess was soon sitting at the door of their tent, talking with Adams and his wife and Sally of the things that had happened to all of them since they parted, that day on the Brazos.

Jess was informed that all the people camped here were Mormons. This was a Mormon rendezvous, where converts to that faith from Texas, Arkansas and the country farther east were gathering, preparatory

to making the journey to Great Salt Lake. Adams had arrived only a day or two before. The wagon-train would start inside of a week.

Jess remained an hour or two, and was urged to wait for dinner, but declined.

"I must get back to camp. Phil Gregory is there, and I know he'll be very much interested in my discovery," he said, with a significant look at Sally Adams. "He was woefully disappointed when we went to your house that day and found you gone."

The young woman blushed slightly, but hastened to say that they hoped to see both Mr. Gregory and the other Californians soon. Adams and his wife seconded the invitation, and included Jess in it.

Jess had guessed rightly when he said that Gregory would be interested in knowing that the Adams family were so near. Phil had intended to go down to the fort that afternoon, but instead of that he shaved, changed his clothes and rode up to the Mormon camp.

During the next few days the responsibility of taking care of the cattle devolved largely upon Jess. And it did not suffer on that account. When Gregory was not at the Mormon camp he was down at Fort Gibson, trying to hurry the outfitting preparations.

"Those Mormons are going to start now in three or four days," he said to Jess once, "and we ought by all means to start with them. There'll be about eighty wagons of them when the others get here, and at least a hundred men that can fight. Reports are coming in that the plains Indians are very troublesome now. A



“MISTER, YOU ARE NOT WANTED IN THIS CAMP.”

number of caravans have been attacked by them during the last month or two. And even if we don't travel with the Mormons, our party and theirs ought to keep within sight of each other, so that if either is attacked the other can go to the rescue."

"That's only common prudence," agreed Jess, though he smiled; for he well knew that Gregory had not mentioned his main reason for wanting to keep close to that Mormon wagon-train.

"And you may say what you please about the Mormons as a class," Gregory went on, "but that outfit up there are good people, Mormons or what not."

"If they're all like the Adams family they are."

But Gregory's good opinion of the Mormons was destined to undergo an early and decided change. Late one afternoon he returned from a visit to their camp with his face red with anger. He dismounted some yards from the camp, and while unsaddling his horse beckoned to Jess.

"What do you think happened to me up there among that polygamous, heathen crew?" he demanded.

"I don't know, Phil. From your looks, it must have been something unpleasant."

"Unpleasant! I never was so mad in my life! Just after I left the camp a fellow I'd never seen before stepped out of the woods in front of me and said: 'Mister, you are not wanted in this camp, and if you take a fool's advice you'll make yourself scarce around here.' And then he turned and disappeared before I could answer a word. In fact, I was astounded — too

much astounded to say anything for a few moments. But I had plenty to say after that, I can tell you, if there'd been anybody to say it to."

"And are you going to take the fool's advice?"

"Take his advice? Of course not! There's only one person in that camp that can send me out of it to stay, and she's far enough from doing it. I'm going back to-morrow, and if anybody interferes with me — " He tapped the handle of his six-shooter.

"Phil, Phil, you're excited," answered Jess. "You don't want to do anything reckless. Those people all stand together, I imagine; and a quarrel with one will mean a quarrel with all. And it's certainly poor policy to quarrel with them if we're going to travel with them."

"Just the same, I'm going back," declared Gregory. And the other knew that he meant it, and would do what he said.

"And just the same," remarked Jess, "there'll be trouble sooner or later if you do."

True to his word, Gregory paid another visit to the Mormon camp next morning, to see Miss Sally Adams. And he did not return to his own camp till noon.

"Well, what did your polygamist friends do to you and say to you up there?" inquired Jess.

"Not a thing, not a word," answered Gregory. "The dog that barks loudest seldom bites. I rode into the camp boldly, as if I owned the whole shebang, and had come to take possession of it. Every Mormon I saw I looked him defiantly in the face. I

wanted them to understand they couldn't scare me."

"You must have gone hunting for trouble, Phil. Better go a little slow. You might find more than you want. You know there are bad reports out about those people. They might do worse than scare you, especially if you irritate them."

"There are bad reports about the Salt Lake Mormons. I've never heard any about these."

"No, not yet. But they're all alike, I guess, or soon will be. Adams rather boasted that the man in charge of the whole party is from Salt Lake, and a particular friend of Brigham Young. What he says goes with them. It's generally understood they know how to get rid of people that are troublesome to them."

"Yes, they may; but they'll have a hard job getting rid of me for the present. I expect to stick to them like a leech from here to Salt Lake."

In spite of Gregory's efforts to hurry the outfitting preparations, it soon became evident that the Bar-Circlers could not start with the Mormons. There was so much to be done. When a wagon had been bought at the fort and loaded with supplies, oxen were sent down for it, to bring it out to the camp. No teams were bought, all the work-animals needed being taken from the herd. Among the twenty-five hundred steers were thirty or forty which, like Ball the bell-steer, had had experience under the yoke. Some of these had grown rather wild, and had to be retamed. But there were not enough of these for all the wagons,

and nearly as many wild steers had to be taken out of the herd and broken to work. And this proved a task that kept all hands busy for days.

One afternoon Phil Gregory returned from a visit to the Mormon camp, and said:

"Well, Jess, I got another warning to-day."

"How was that?"

"Just after I started home a small boy ran up and handed me a piece of paper, then turned and ran away. Here's the paper. It says:

"'If you don't keep away from this camp, your friends may look for you in the Arkansas.'"

"That's a cold-blooded threat," remarked Jess, after a glance at the paper. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Just what I did with the other — pay no attention to it."

"You're going back, then?"

"Of course I'm going back. The party are expecting to start some time in the forenoon to-morrow, and I told Miss Adams I'd be there to see them off. And I'll keep my word."

"Then you'd better take a lot of the boys with you, to make sure that nothing happens to you."

"I don't want any crowd, Jess."

"You'd better take at least one man. If those warnings are for any purpose but to scare you, there'll be less danger for two than for one."

"All right. You might go with me. I'm not afraid of the whole polygamous gang! I want

that understood. But you want to see the Adamses again, anyhow, I've no doubt."

So next morning, soon after breakfast, Gregory and Jess set out for the Mormon camp. As they were riding along at an easy gait, Gregory said:

"Have you read much of Washington Irving's writings, Jess?"

"Well, not so very much. I've read Rip Van Winkle and the Legend of Sleepy Hollow. Nobody could ever forget those."

"No, I should say not. Irving is my favorite author. I've read everything he ever wrote, I think. But he hasn't written anything that I like better than 'A Tour of the Prairies.' I first read it when I was a boy, and fell in love with it. And I've read it at least a dozen times since. What makes me speak of it is that the trip he describes, or at least the part he describes in detail, began right here at Fort Gibson."

"It did? When was Irving here?"

"In the fall of 1832 — nearly twenty-two years ago. They outfitted here, and traveled up the Arkansas a good many miles, as we're going to do. Later they crossed over and made a considerable trip to the west, as far as the headwaters of Red River. I've got the book among my things in the wagon, and if you care to read it I'll lend it to you."

"Why, yes; I'd be glad to read it."

"Like nearly everything else Irving has written, it makes cheerful reading. One of the things hard to forget is the little dog in the blacksmith shop, waiting

for his turn to be shod. Another is the skunk that little Tonish, Irving's hired man, had prepared to cook. Irving chucked the nasty mess into the river on the sly."

The two horsemen were now nearing the Mormon camp. They rode boldly into it, and stopped at Adams's wagon. Everywhere throughout the camp preparations were already under way for an early start. Most of the men had their oxen yoked, and a few of the teams had been put to the wagons.

It appeared to Jess that Adams was not particularly glad to see Gregory. But Sally Adams evidently was, and Phil probably never so much as noticed the lack of warmth in her uncle's manner.

While Gregory was talking to the young woman, Jess talked mostly with her uncle. Adams had his oxen yoked, and was dipping their feet in hot tallow. This was supposed to toughen and harden their hoofs for the journey. Jess helped with the work, which was rather difficult. For every now and then one of those long-legged brutes would send both pan and hot grease flying.

Adams was one of the first to start. While the two visitors were saying good-bye, Gregory remarked:

"We expect to be on the road in two or three days; and we shall probably overtake you before long. If you look back from the highest places, you may catch sight of us. When we get close enough, Jess and I will ride ahead to learn how you're standing the trip."

"I'm sure we shall be glad to see both of you," an-

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swered Sally, who, though modest enough, was never afraid to speak for herself.

But Jess noticed that neither Adams nor his wife said anything. And he had more than a suspicion that both of them would have been better pleased if the Bar-Circlers, or at least Phil Gregory, had been going to travel in some other direction.

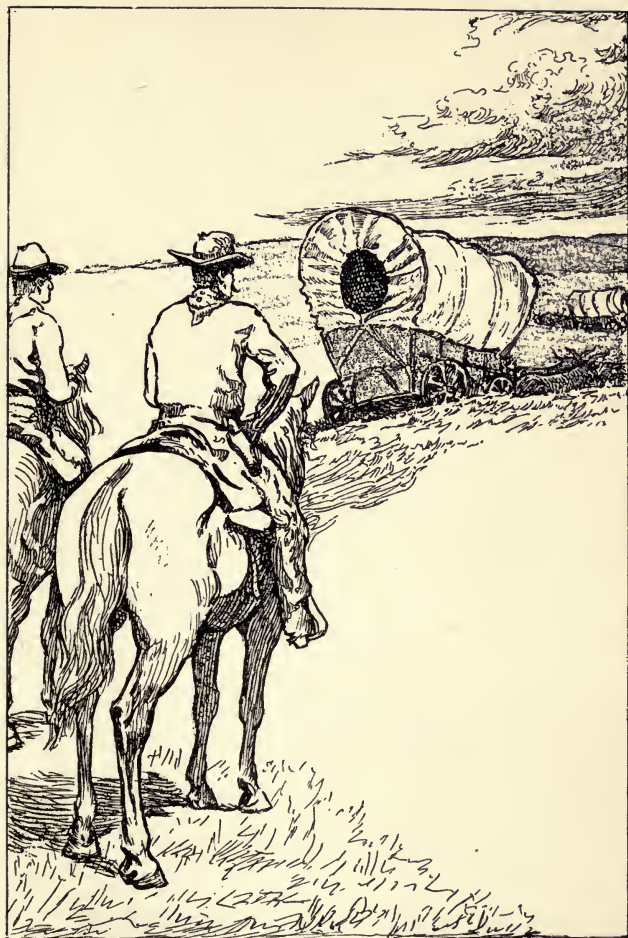
CHAPTER XX

NORTHWESTWARD HO!

INSTEAD of returning as they had come, Jess and Gregory rode out upon the high prairie. Dismounting there, they stood watching the nearly eighty wagons file out of the woods and start on their long journey. It was an interesting sight, that great wagon-train, and the two men gazed at it till the last of the ox-drawn, canvas-topped wagons had disappeared. Then they rode back to their own camp.

The three days following were busy ones for all the Bar-Circle Outfit. That same afternoon Jess rode down to the fort and bought a good rifle, plenty of ammunition, and such other things as he needed or expected to need. For they were now about to plunge into the wilderness, and it would be long before they would have an opportunity to supply their wants again. The other hands, or such of them as had not already gone, also went down and armed themselves. From here on most of their journey would be through an Indian country, and there was no telling when or how often they would have to fight for their lives.

On the fourth morning after the Mormon wagon-train had started, the Bar-Circle Outfit took the same trail. Their caravan was longer now. For behind the lengthy line of beeves came a string of eight white-



IT WAS AN INTERESTING SIGHT, THAT GREAT WAGON TRAIN.

topped wagons, each drawn by from three to six yoke of oxen — a considerable wagon-train of itself.

At the head of the line rode Jess Holloway, as before. But on the opposite side was Sam Patterson, the half-breed. Next behind Sam, but a good distance back, came Hawk Tail the Choctaw. And next behind Jess, on the same side, rode Soos the Mexican. All these had proved themselves good hands. Behind them the other cowboys were scattered at regular intervals. Burgess, with those precious saddle-bags — much lightened by the outfitting, however — still brought up the rear. Granny, the cook, mounted on a gentle horse, was also helping to drive.

Thus the caravan made a new start on its way to the far Pacific. Now it was moving toward — though not directly toward — its destination. The time was about the middle of June, and the weather was clear and still pleasant. The whole party, numbering more than twenty souls, were setting out with strong courage and high hopes.

Again, as on the first morning, Jess Holloway, galloping up and down by the tramping line of long-horns, was seeing visions of a wonderful journey. But his youthful enthusiasm was sobered by the reflection that, since Ed Simpson had fallen by the way, he himself, though the youngest member of the party, was the acknowledged leader of the drivers, and the one most trusted by his employers. And he knew that in his position no small share of responsibility rested upon him.

For a time occasional cabins could be seen — cabins of the Creek and perhaps other Indians. But soon the last human habitation had been left behind, and the Bar-Circle caravan plunged into the great, savage-infested wilderness. They had passed through many hardships already, but greater hardships, mingled with dangers, awaited them.

One afternoon in the latter part of June, a great cloud of dust might have been seen rolling up the valley of the Arkansas. The cloud was both wide and long — far longer than it was wide — and while its base moved along the ground, its upper part floated high in air. Under it a big but scarcely discernible drove of steers were tramping steadily, doggedly. Some of them had their mouths open; for besides the dust the sun was blazing down, and the heat was frightful.

Along the edges of the cloud hovered the drivers. Sometimes they dashed in to hurry the lagging cattle, and then dashed back to the open air to breathe. Not only their hats and clothes and their horses, but their hands and faces were thickly coated over with gray.

"Sam, don't you wish we had some of that rain that nearly drowned us back there in the Nation?" Jess Holloway called out to the cowboy opposite him. They had ridden far enough ahead of the cattle to catch sight of each other.

"Yes, I do. This is the worst I've ever seen," replied the half-breed, fairly gasping in the dust. "Yesterday was bad enough, but it wasn't a patching to

to-day. And the sun — did you ever run into such broiling weather? ”

“ It’s pretty severe, Sam. But I wouldn’t mind the heat so much if it wasn’t for this fog. There’s just breeze enough to keep our dust afloat, and it’s in the right direction and blows just hard enough to hold the dust over us. Not much hope for relief till the wind changes, or we get a shower.”

“ That Mormon outfit has ground the trail to powder, and now we come along and get it all,” the half-breed grumbled. “ I wish we were ahead of them. Our own dust is enough, without having to smother in somebody else’s.”

“ Well, there’s one consolation, Sam. We’re climbing — climbing all the time. When we get five or six thousand feet above sea-level, it won’t be sultry any more, they say. Just the sight of a snow-capped mountain would do me good to-day.”

“ The Arkansas is fed by melting snows, isn’t it? ”

“ Yes. But that’s a long, long way from here. That water yonder may be snow-water, but it looks like it’s almost simmering in the sun. And those sand-bars would roast an egg. Still, I’d like a swim out there, and I’m going to have one just as soon as we stop.”

“ So am I,” replied the half-breed.

All the afternoon the sun blazed down in its fury upon the prairie and river and the wide, beaten trail. And all the afternoon the great dust-cloud hung over and enveloped the marching caravan.

The trail seldom withdrew far from the Arkansas.

Often it ran only a few yards from the river-bank. The timber that had fringed the stream for a good distance up had disappeared, and now only an occasional cottonwood was to be seen. The river's banks were low and its channel wide. The flood that had been rolling down here only a few weeks before had drained out, and now part of the sandy bed was dry. The white bars lay glimmering in the glare of the summer sunshine.

The half-breed uttered a shout. "Look yonder!" he called, pointing to a distant rise.

Jess turned quickly. Two horsemen were standing on the crest of the rise, outlined against the sky. Far away though they were, he easily recognized them as Indians — Indian spies. For the caravan was now in the country of the hostiles, both Pawnees and Comanches. These were not the first that had been seen.

"They're watching us like hawks. I wonder what they think of us."

"They're thinking how they'd like to kill and scalp us all, and then plunder our wagons, I guess," replied Sam.

Half a dozen times that afternoon the cowboys noticed those mounted spies. For some unknown reason, the Indians were keeping a close watch on the caravan. They bobbed up on every mound or rise.

Little groups of grazing buffaloes could also be seen — dark spots on the sunburnt hills. Sometimes fifty or a hundred of them, drinking at the river, would take fright at the approaching caravan and go lumbering

away across the valley at the top of their awkward speed.

When at last the sun was not very high, the cattle were turned down to the river for water, and then allowed to scatter over the valley to graze. Passing by them, the wagons stopped in a semi-circle farther up, the river-bank forming one side of the camp, like a string to a bow. There the teamsters unyoked their oxen, belling one and hobbling several, and let them go.

No sooner had the cowboys caught fresh horses and staked them, and unsaddled and turned loose their tired ones, than all the men hurried down to the water's edge for a swim. So dusty were they as to be scarcely recognizable. A buffalo-path led down the bank. At the bottom was a narrow, sandy bench, on which grew a good-sized cottonwood. Here the party threw off their clothes. Deep water came close up to the bench.

All were soon in the river — owners, cowboys, teamsters and cook — everybody except the two herders with the cattle. And a lively, noisy party they made, swimming and diving, and ducking one another like playful school-boys. All were good swimmers, but the two most at home in the water were Hawk Tail, the long-haired Choctaw, and the Deserter. Everybody was surprised at the latter; for, with the exception of bragging, this was the only thing the former soldier had been known to do well.

After half an hour or so Burgess left the water and stood on the bank to dry. As he stood in plain view,

many curious eyes were turned toward his scarred back. Jess noticed that the scars beginning on his neck extended downward a foot or more. Vividly they recalled that camp-fire story of Burgess's bear-hunt. They had been made by the stroke of the grizzly's paw. Jess could distinctly see where the claws had plowed their way down through the flesh.

On Burgess's left thigh were other frightful scars, where the grizzly had seized him, the big teeth mangle the flesh and crushing the bone.

Burgess had his saddle-bags lying with his clothes. Having dressed, he picked them up, climbed the bank with them, and walked over to the wagons.

After leaving the water, several of the men washed their shirts and spread them on the grass to dry. A few had clean shirts to put on, but others went about with the upper parts of their bodies bare.

Jess and Phil Gregory were the last to come out. While they were dressing, Gregory said:

"Jess, how close behind our Mormon friends do you think we are?"

"Well, we're not in sight. But from the appearance of that camp we passed this morning, we must be gaining on them."

"I didn't notice any fire there. Nothing but dead ashes that I could see."

"No. But fires made of buffalo-chips die out quick. And the drift-wood, if they used any, would either be very dry, and soon burn up, or water-soaked, and soon quit burning. You couldn't expect such fires as those

to last long. We ought to be able to catch sight of their dust to-morrow or next day."

It was twelve o'clock that night when Jess went on herd-duty. There were four of the night-herders out at the same time now. Ever since entering the country of the hostile Indians, they had been keeping a double guard around the cattle at night. And every man carried his gun while patrolling the herd.

A good while after Jess had begun his two-hours' ride, he was startled by hearing the roaring of hoofs coming from some low hills that bordered the valley on the north. At first he was under the impression that there must be another herd of cattle over there somewhere, and that they had stampeded. But he soon realized the truth, and quickly shouted:

"It's buffaloes, boys! They're making this way! Let's head 'em off!"

CHAPTER XXI

BURGESS'S SADDLE-BAGS STOLEN

AWAY the four horsemen dashed, to meet the wild herd. From the noise made, they knew there must be several hundred of the buffaloes. The moon was shining, and no sooner had those shaggy, awkward forms become visible than the cowboys began to yell to split their throats, and to wave their hats and fire their six-shooters. The buffaloes promptly wheeled, heading in another direction, and thundered away till they passed out of sight.

When, the danger averted, the herders returned to the cattle, they found every steer on his feet. But all were standing quietly.

The time of Jess and the three herders with him had now expired, and he rode to the camp to send out the relief. There he found everybody up and much excited, and armed and ready for battle.

"What's the matter with all you people?" he demanded, in surprise.

"Why, we thought the Pawnees had attacked you, Jess," answered Burgess. "What were you making so much noise about?"

"Oh, that's all over now," he replied. Then he told what had happened, adding: "I have a suspicion that there may have been Indians somewhere

behind those buffaloes. They drove the buffaloes down on us to stampede our cattle. And the wonder is that they didn't succeed. If the buffaloes had once got among the steers, there would have been the wildest kind of a stampede. It was a close call."

Jess had met the men some fifty yards from the half-circle of wagons, and they all stood talking together there for perhaps half an hour. When the relief herders had ridden away, and those relieved had come in, the whole party returned to the camp and prepared for sleep.

There was no tent up. In fact, the tent had not been used since they left Fort Gibson, the weather being too dry and mild to require it. Some of the men slept under the wagons, but most of them lay on their blankets in the open air.

Jess had thrown himself down and was already half asleep, when he was recalled to consciousness by voices on the other side of the camp. He soon became aware that Burgess and Johnson were talking, though he failed to understand what they said. Presently he heard Gregory's voice mingled with theirs. It was easy to tell that something was wrong. A little later Gregory came across the camp and said:

"Are you asleep, Jess? Step over here, please."

Jess slipped on his pantaloons and boots and went.

"What's the matter now?" he inquired, on coming to where the three partners were standing.

"Matter enough!" replied Johnson, angrily.

"We've been robbed!"

"What!" exclaimed the young cowboy, incredulously.

"That's right, Jess," said Burgess. "We've been robbed of nearly every cent we had in the world. My saddle-bags have been stolen."

"Where were they? And when did you first miss them, Mr. Burgess?"

"They were under my head, where I always keep them at night. When I thought the redskins were making an attack, I grabbed up my gun and ran off and left the saddle-bags — forgot all about them. That's something I don't generally do, as you well know. But in my excitement I didn't think of them again till I came back here and lay down. Then I discovered that they were gone."

"Where is the —" Jess began; but he stopped.

"I don't know whether he was out there or not. None of us can recollect seeing him," said Burgess, who knew very well whom Jess had started to speak of. Indeed, all their suspicions had turned instantly in the same direction. There was but one member of their party that any of them suspected. But, knowing that there was a possibility of doing an innocent man an injustice, they refrained from mentioning his name, even among themselves.

"Wait a minute," said Jess. He walked around the curved line of wagons, counting the sleepers. When he had come back, they talked in low tones.

"I find every man in his place," he reported. "The one that we all have in mind is there, and seems

to be sleeping as soundly as any of them. Only the four herders are gone."

"The worst of it is, Jess," said Gregory, "we'd all emptied our belts into those saddle-bags. Gold is heavy and troublesome to carry around one, especially in warm weather. So when the outfitting expenses had been paid at Fort Gibson, we all put our money into the saddle-bags for Burgess to take care of. There was nearly six thousand dollars of it. And now this loss leaves us almost penniless so far as ready money is concerned. It's true we've got our outfit —"

"It mustn't be a loss," declared Jess, decidedly. "Those saddle-bags are somewhere close by, and we can find them — we've got to find them, and find the thief, too."

"We all suspect the same man," said Johnson. "And while I don't care to make any accusations without some evidence, there's no question in my mind that the fellow is guilty. More than once I've noticed him with his eyes fixed on those bags of gold, like a hungry wolf eying a fat pig."

Jess laughed. "If you're going to suspect everybody that has looked at those saddle-bags curiously, I'm afraid you'll have to suspect the whole outfit of us," he said. "I know I've looked at them very often. In fact, for a while, until I got used to them, my eyes would just naturally turn toward them whenever they were in sight."

After a lengthy consultation, it was decided to call all hands out, tell them of the robbery, and then make

a thorough search for the missing saddle-bags. And that was what they did. Every man in the party expressed a willingness to be searched, if that was thought necessary, and to aid in the search for the stolen gold.

"Somebody got them saddle-bags, and somebody in this camp got 'em," declared Davis, the wagon-master. "Until the guilty man is caught, every mother's son of us is under suspicion. There's no denyin' that. Let's get to work and see what we can discover."

A careful search was made, but nothing was found, and nothing new was learned. Burgess then told everybody to lie down again. The partners themselves were too much worried over their loss to think of sleeping. They stayed up, sitting on their blankets, to make sure that nobody should leave the camp.

When daylight came a thorough search was made, in the wagons, in the grass, and everywhere else that a pair of saddle-bags might have been hidden, for hundreds of yards around. All the forenoon and part of the afternoon were spent in the search, but no trace of the stolen gold could be discovered.

"It's possible," said Burgess, "that somebody has been following us, waiting for a chance to slip into the camp and steal that money. And at last he found his chance."

That was what he said to all the hands. But to his partners and to Jess, when the four were alone together, he remarked:

"It's entirely possible, as I said to the boys, that somebody has been following us. But it is far more probable that the thief is right here among us. He had been waiting and watching for that very chance, and when it came he was quick to take advantage of it."

"But what did he do with the saddle-bags, Joe?" asked Gregory.

"That's what I don't know, Phil; and that is what we've got to find out. He cached them so skillfully that there's no sign left. It's possible, I suppose, to take up a piece of turf, dig a hole and bury the saddle-bags under it, and then put it back. But I don't see how he did all that and did it so well in so short a time."

"And that without leaving a clod of fresh dirt to show where he dug," said Jess. "I don't see how he could have done that in the moonlight. He certainly couldn't have buried the money anywhere close by."

"The thing that puzzles me most is why the fellow didn't take the money while he had it, and travel with it," said Johnson.

"That is strange, Jeddy," answered Burgess. "That's another thing that makes it seem possible that the thief was somebody that has been following us. One of our own party would have got away while he could."

"But maybe he couldn't," Jess answered. "All the staked horses were out there close to where we

were talking, and he didn't care to start off on foot, carrying those heavy bags."

"You've hit it, Jess. That's the very reason. I hadn't thought of that," said Burgess. "Now the only question is: When will he try to get away? Or will he go on with us to California, and return afterwards for his stolen treasure? That would be the sensible thing for him to do."

"Yes, but that's just what he won't do, Joe," said Johnson.

"Thieves never do the sensible thing," Gregory observed. "If they did, they wouldn't be thieves."

"This fellow will be so eager to get to spending that money that he can't rest till he slips away, I think," was Jess's opinion.

"That's exactly what I think about it," said Burgess. "We can safely count on that. That's how he'll betray himself — by trying to run away."

"I think I could make him betray himself quicker than that."

"How, Jeddy?" inquired Gregory.

"Why, with a rope and a propped-up wagon-tongue. About the time we began to stretch his neck, he'd be only too glad to tell where those saddle-bags are concealed."

"Jeddy, we couldn't do that," answered Burgess. "In the first place, there isn't one particle of evidence against that man — the man you're thinking of. He may be as innocent of that crime as a baby. And even if he's guilty, and we couldn't make him confess, we

might never learn where the money is. Our best plan is to wait and watch till he betrays himself. We'll let him find the money for us."

"That's the safest course," said Gregory. "And we don't want to take it for granted that we know who the thief is. We might watch some innocent man, and let the guilty one get away. Gold is very tempting, and, as Davis says, every man that was near the camp when that money disappeared is under suspicion. Jess and Soos and Hawk Tail and Dick McCarty were out with the cattle at the time, and they can't be guilty. Jess wouldn't have been under suspicion anyway. But nearly everybody else would. Of course we want to keep an especially close watch on the man we all suspect. If he tries to get away to-night, he'll go before the moon rises. You can depend on that."

"Maybe it would be better not to watch anybody," suggested Jess. "Maybe we ought to make it easy for the thief to get away."

"What do you mean, Jess?" demanded Johnson, almost sternly.

But when Jess had explained his plan, all endorsed it, and they proceeded to carry it out. In pursuance of this plan, the caravan started about the middle of the afternoon, and traveled six or seven miles, till sunset, before stopping for the night.

Soon after supper Burgess remarked:

"Boys, we don't want any more trouble with the buffaloes to-night. I think some of us had better take

a little ride around the country and see if there are any close by."

"I'll go," announced Johnson. "Who volunteers to go with me?"

Gregory and Jess expressed their willingness to take a ride, and so did several others, Soos and Hawk Tail among them. Those four were accepted.

"That'll be enough," Johnson said. "Don't forget your guns, boys. We're as apt to find redskins as buffaloes."

The five mounted and rode away toward the northwest. After assuring themselves that there were no buffaloes in the vicinity, the party turned, and making a wide circuit of their present camp, rode hard for the place where they had camped the night before.

On arriving there, all dismounted. Soos led the five horses to a ravine a quarter of a mile beyond, where they could be concealed. The other four men lay down in some high grass on the river-bank, where they could overlook both their former camp and all the surrounding valley.

An hour passed, and the moon, rising from behind some hills to the east, was flooding the valley and the river with its soft, silvery light. The voices of frogs in the stream, the shrill cries of insects, and the yap-yaping of coyotes were the only sounds that broke the stillness.

"Well, he's not coming to-night; that's plain," said Johnson, sitting up. "We've had all our trouble for nothing. The fellow won't try to steal a horse and

leave the camp after moonrise. So there's nothing for us to do but go back and wait till — ”

Jess raised his hand warningly. “I thought I heard something,” he said.

All listened, and soon their strained ears could detect sounds coming from far up the valley — the hoof-beats of a galloping horse!

CHAPTER XXII

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR

SOON the horseman came into view. Even while he was a good distance off, they easily recognized his figure.

"Just exactly as I expected!" muttered Johnson, wrathfully. "I knew if there was any devilment on foot, that Deserter would be at the bottom of it. If I'd had my way, we'd have strung him up until he told where that money is, without going to all this trouble."

Not for an instant did the horseman hesitate. Riding up to the river-bank, he dismounted. After listening a few moments, evidently for pursuers, he untied his lariat, and running down the bank, secured the end of it to the cottonwood. Then he laid aside his hat and six-shooter, jerked off his boots, and began to strip off his clothes.

"What under the sun is the fellow up to? Is he going to take a swim?" whispered Gregory.

"Not for fun," Jess whispered back. "He's got something on hand besides amusement. Look how anxious he is!"

Having removed all his clothes, the Deserter had stopped to listen again. Hearing nothing to excite his fears, he turned and, after carefully noting his position by the tree, began to wade into the stream. Half a

dozen steps brought him to swimming water. He swam only a few strokes, then suddenly disappeared.

A full minute passed, and still he had not come to the surface.

"What's the fellow doing — drowning himself?" whispered Gregory.

"No drowning there," answered Jess, who suspected why the Deserter had dived. "There he comes now!"

Thrusting up his head, the man remained motionless, treading water noiselessly, till he could breathe and listen for pursuers. Then he dived again.

Half a dozen times he went down and came up, seemingly for no purpose at all. But evidently there was some object down there that he wanted and was determined to find.

At last he came up with something in his hand. It proved to be the end of a rope. Again and again he was seen to pull on it; but being in the water, he pulled himself under without raising the object to which the rope was attached.

By this time all the watchers understood the situation. The gold-heavy saddle-bags, they had no doubt, had been dropped into the water there, with a short rope tied to them as an aid in finding them. The man had got hold of the rope, but for some reason was not able to raise the saddle-bags with it.

"They've sunk into the sand, and he can't pull them out," whispered Jess.

After trying again and again, the man in the river

ceased his exertions. The rope was not long enough for him to swim to the bank with it, and he could do nothing while in the water. He glanced toward the lariat that the horse was tied with.

Johnson and those with him had been holding a whispered consultation.

"That gold's down there — no doubt about that," said Gregory. "Even if he can't get it up, we can. We'd better capture the fellow now, while he's unarmed and at our mercy."

"That's right," agreed Johnson. "And even if the money should not be there, we can soon make him tell where it is. This is as good a time as any. Come on!" They all sprang up and rushed over to the river-bank.

"Now we've got you, General!" cried Johnson.

For a few moments the man in the water seemed petrified with astonishment. But if the party on the bank were expecting to capture him easily, they were much mistaken. The Deserter was a good swimmer and diver, and he suddenly disappeared. Johnson jerked out his six-shooter and stood waiting for the fellow to come up.

Gregory laid his hand on Johnson's arm. "Don't shoot, Jeddy, till you give him a chance to surrender."

The Deserter remained under water a long time, as it seemed to those waiting. When at length his head did bob up, he was fifty yards out in the river and still moving fast.

"Stop, or I fire!" yelled Johnson. And he did fire,

almost at the same moment. But the fugitive had dived again before the bullet struck the water.

Seeing that the Deserter was likely to escape, Hawk Tail laid aside his gun and six-shooter, and jerking off his boots and clothes, was quickly in the river, swimming after him. The next time the fugitive's head appeared, Johnson sent a bullet at it with his rifle. Then he quickly dropped the empty gun, and untying the horse, sprang upon him and spurred down the bank into the water. He was bent upon capturing the man.

"Oh, Jeddy, come back and let him go!" Gregory called out.

But Johnson urged his swimming horse on. And every time the fugitive came to the surface, he called to him to stop, and sent a bullet after him by way of emphasizing the command. Hawk Tail was also moving through the water fast, but both pursuers were far behind the fugitive, who was diving and swimming for life.

The river, or at least the water, was only a few hundred yards wide, and before long the two men on the bank saw the naked Deserter emerge from the stream at its far edge and go running like a streak across the sand. Soon he leaped upon the farther bank and disappeared in the hazy distance, before his pursuers were out of the water.

Both followed him as soon as they could; but after being gone fifteen or twenty minutes, they were seen coming back together. Again they swam the river.

"Well, he got away from us," Johnson remarked,

after dismounting from the streaming horse at the water's edge, near the cottonwood.

"Let him go — let him go," said Jess, who, like Gregory, had been an interested but inactive spectator of the whole performance. "What could we do with him, even if you had captured him?"

Johnson did not answer, but Hawk Tail, who was out of the water by this time, was quick to say:

"Us hang General, 'way high up. But no ketchee. Him swim heap fast; dive like duck."

"Well, the punishment he has brought upon himself is likely to be severer than I would be willing to inflict upon him," Gregory remarked. "Think of his situation! He's without clothes, hat, boots or weapons, in a country swarming with hostile Indians, and a long distance from the nearest settlement. He's pretty shifty, but it's a hard row he'll have to hoe."

Soos, having heard the shots, and knowing that there was no further need of concealment, now came leading the horses. He was greatly surprised when told that the Deserter had actually escaped from all of them.

"Now let's see if those saddle-bags are down there," said Jess. "If they are, we're all right."

"And if they're not, we're about six thousand dollars out," remarked Johnson.

Hawk Tail swam out and dived, again and again, and finally got hold of the rope. But he, too, was unable to pull up whatever the rope was fastened to. Jess threw him the end of a lariat, and when the two ropes had been tied together, Jess got ready to pull.

"Now let's see what kind of a fish we've caught," he said, bracing his feet. Johnson and Gregory stood by, watching anxiously.

After a long, steady pull, the sand gave way, and Jess drew out the object that had been buried in it.

There was no disappointment. A pair of soaked saddle-bags emerged from the water at the end of the rope.

Gregory and Johnson opened the saddle-bags on the spot, and took out the money. It was in twenty-dollar gold-pieces, wrapped in buckskin. By counting the rolls, they soon learned that all the stolen money had been recovered. Doubtless the thief had not taken time to open the saddle-bags, and probably he had never so much as caught a glimpse of the gold itself.

"Well, that was a sly trick," laughed Gregory. "If he'd hid the saddle-bags anywhere else, we should probably have found them. But the water left no trace."

"The General must have thought out that plan in advance," Jess remarked.

"And the buffalo excitement was his chance to carry it out," said Johnson. "I wonder what will become of the fellow."

"No telling," Gregory answered. "If the Indians let him alone, he'll probably reach the settlements sooner or later."

"Well, if he does, he'll have to go it naked," declared Johnson, as he caught up the Deserter's clothes and tossed them far out into the river.

"I'd leave his boots, Jeddy, I believe," said Gregory. But even as he spoke the boots followed the clothes into the river.

"We've had trouble enough with that scoundrel," growled Johnson. "The only thing I'd like to leave him is a rope."

And Jess remarked: "He'll have a hard time of it. But the way of transgressors has always been hard."

"Yes, and it ought to be hard. And I don't propose to do anything to make it easy," declared Johnson. "But we'd better be riding."

They appropriated the Deserter's six-shooter and blankets, the only property he had possessed. The gun, as well as both the horse and the saddle, belonged to the partners.

"Well, I'm rather glad the fellow got away," Burgess remarked, when the party had returned to camp and related their recent experiences. "I don't know what we could have done with a prisoner. What will become of him?"

The question is still unanswered. Whether the Deserter eventually reached the settlements or perished in the wilderness, is unknown.

Next morning one of the cowboys was put to driving the driverless wagon, and the caravan moved on as before. The partners were all well pleased at the recovery of their money, but Gregory was impatient at the time lost. It would throw them farther behind the Mormon wagon-train.

Two nights later the steers stampeded. The drove broke into three or four pieces, but none of the divisions ran very far. The herders rode with them, and got them all together again next morning. A count proved that none had been lost.

The curious thing about the matter was the discovery, next morning, of a dead Indian lying near where the stampede had begun. He had doubtless been crawling up to stampede the cattle or shoot one of the herders, when the steers took fright, starting so suddenly that he had no time to escape. He was badly trampled, and they left him lying where they found him. He was probably a Pawnee.

One night, after supper, Gregory asked Jess to take a walk to the top of a neighboring mound.

"I thought I noticed a dust-cloud ahead to-day," he explained, after they had started. "And if I did, we may be able to catch a glimpse of the Mormon camp-fires."

"I'm sure I saw a dust-cloud up the trail, more than once," Jess answered. "But of course I couldn't tell whether it was the Mormons stirring it up, or buffaloes, or only a whirlwind. Anyhow, we can't be far behind the Mormons now. Their camp-signs are too fresh."

Gregory took a run, and was the first to reach the top of the mound. He promptly uttered a shout. On joining him, Jess looked in the direction his friend indicated, and could make out several twinkling points of light, which he knew to be camp-fires.

"We're in sight of them at last!" cried Gregory, gazing intently. "And, Jess, until you get infatuated with some girl, and have her traveling in a wagon-train ahead of you, you'll never know how glad I am to catch a glimpse of those fires."

"We ought to overtake that outfit in a few days now," Jess remarked, by way of encouragement.

"The thing that worries me, Jess, is what may have happened since I saw Miss Adams. She must choose between her religion and me, you understand. The Mormons won't have it any other way. When I took leave of her, there close to Fort Gibson, she was halting between two opinions. Her faith had never been very strong, I think; and being a religious man myself, I had half convinced her that all the Mormon prophets, so called, were cheap, vulgar humbugs. However, she hadn't altogether given up her religion, and it's possible that by this time her uncle and aunt and others have convinced her that I'm a humbug. In fact, it's entirely possible that I may find her married to some of those fellows. They're great at marrying, those Mormons."

CHAPTER XXIII

CLIMBING THE ARKANSAS RIVER

THE lights were further away than Jess and Gregory supposed, and it was not till two or three days after the Mormon camp had been sighted that they found themselves near enough to the Mormons to visit them. They rode over one night after supper, and were hospitably received by Adams and his family. Gregory found an opportunity to talk to the niece, leaving Adams and his wife to Jess.

On the ride back, Gregory told Jess that Miss Adams was no stronger in the Mormon faith than when she had started from Fort Gibson. On the contrary, she was weaker, if anything; and Adams himself was somewhat dissatisfied with the way matters were being managed in the Mormon camp. With the usual independence of a frontiersman, he was little disposed to have all his affairs directed by some one else. As yet he was only grumbling; but Gregory was hopeful that his dissatisfaction might ripen to open rebellion sooner or later.

"And I suppose you're much relieved to find Miss Sally still unmarried?" Jess remarked.

"Yes. But it seems now that there never was much danger of that — none at all, I guess. You know, Jess, the devil always overreaches himself. And that's exactly what he did in this case. The Mormon elder

that wanted to marry her has a rival now — another Mormon elder. Both are infatuated with her, and both want to marry her. And the result is they're snarling at each other like two curs. It's laughable — to me. But the most ridiculous part of it all is, each of them has had a revelation directly from heaven to the effect that Miss Adams must marry him. I've told her again and again that all those so-called revelations were either lies or silly delusions; but it seemed incredible to her that the Mormon leaders could be such scoundrels. And now those contradictory revelations have opened her eyes. She knows that some of their so-called religious men are liars and hypocrites, and she's half ready to believe that the others may be. Did Adams say anything to you — anything to indicate that his faith is weakening?"

"Not a word, Phil," Jess replied.

"Perhaps he hasn't got far enough along for that yet, and perhaps he wouldn't dare say so if he had, being still in the Mormon camp. But besides being dissatisfied with Mormon ways, he has seen things that have at least partly opened his eyes — so Miss Adams says. The fact is, Jess, Adams is much superior to the common run of 'Latter Day Saints' in point of intelligence; and in education, at least, Sally is much superior to her uncle. The wonder to me is that she ever got caught in the delusion. She wouldn't have been caught if the essential, distinctive teachings of Mormonism had been preached to her at first. But with Satanic cunning, all the disgusting things in it were held back

till later. It didn't take much to open her eyes, though; and it may not take a great deal more to open her uncle's and aunt's eyes. No telling what will happen before this long journey is over. I'm hoping to persuade the whole family to go on with us to California."

The Mormons were still several miles ahead of the Bar-Circlers. And they would have been much further ahead but for the fact that they had stopped a day to hunt buffaloes, and a day longer to dry their meat. Soon after Jess and Gregory had visited the Mormon camp, the Bar-Circle party passed through an unusual experience.

They had been seeing buffaloes for two or three weeks now, and had killed several of them, for their meat. Besides these, nearly every member of the party had shot one or more, out of a natural desire to kill. Jess himself, carried away with the first excitement, had pursued and brought down a huge bull, just to be able to boast that he had slain a buffalo. For a short time he was much elated over his success. But after gazing at his motionless victim for a few minutes, his accomplishment seemed rather small. On returning to camp, he said to Gregory:

"Do you know, Phil, I half wished I hadn't killed him. In fact, if I could have brought the big fellow to life, I'd have been glad to do it, and let him go in peace. There seemed so little excuse for his lying there dead. Hunting buffaloes is thrillingly exciting, but I'll not kill any more, I guess, till I'm sure they're

needed for meat. It makes a fellow feel too mean afterwards."

"You're sensible, Jess," answered Gregory. "Shooting animals just to see them stagger about and fall down dead lacks only one thing of being savagery. And that is that it's worse than savagery. Savages don't do it. The cruelest redskins in North America don't have any such amusement. I've been across the plains twice — this is the third time; and the wanton destruction I've seen of those harmless animals has half disgusted me with my kind. Like you, I caught the excitement and the craze to kill at first. But the few I've shot since then were certainly needed for meat."

One morning about ten o'clock the fore end of the drove passed round a bend in the Arkansas, and Jess, gazing far ahead, saw the uplands on both sides of the river black with moving objects. Instinctively he uttered a shout.

"Buffaloes! Buffaloes!" he cried, pointing to call Sam's attention to them.

The half-breed was much excited at the spectacle, and he, too, uttered a whoop; and so did Hawk Tail and Soos, the moment they came in sight of the vast herd. The cry of "Buffaloes!" passed back along the line, until everybody knew that great numbers of the big game had been sighted.

It was not till an hour later that the caravan approached the buffaloes. By this time a dull rumbling filled the air — the trampling of myriads of hooved feet. The animals were on both sides of the trail, and

the country was black with them, further than the eye could reach. Jess and Hawk Tail galloped ahead to open a way.

As the two horsemen bore down upon them, the buffaloes parted and took to flight. By yelling, waving their hats and firing their six-shooters, Jess and the Choctaw easily cleared the trail. The frightened brutes fled wildly for a few hundred yards, stirring up a fog of dust as their hoofs pounded the parched prairie with a roar of thunder.

The vast herd covered the country for miles, and the caravan was hours passing through it. And all that time Jess and Hawk Tail had to ride in advance of the cattle to keep the way clear. As the buffaloes parted and rolled back, carcasses were seen scattered over the valley on both sides of the trail; and flocks of buzzards and numerous wolves — white wolves, gray wolves and coyotes — were feasting on them greedily. Doubtless the dead buffaloes had been shot down and left here by the Mormons in the wagon-train ahead.

As the buffaloes parted before the advance riders, Jess had a good opportunity to observe them closely. Some of the bulls, of which there were many, were engaged in fighting. And so intent were they on their savage business that not till the two cowboys were close upon them did they break apart and take to flight. Others could be seen wallowing in the dust.

The steers themselves gazed at the buffaloes in some alarm as they marched through them. But there was

a wide lane open, and no trouble occurred. Stopping the drove here was out of the question. And it was not till the buffaloes had been left behind, and long past the usual nooning time, that the caravan halted for dinner.

The Mormon wagon-train was now in sight. It was only a few miles ahead, and when night came on Gregory rode over to the other camp to call on Miss Sally Adams. He had covered less than half the distance on his way back, when a chorus of wild yells suddenly burst out on the stillness!

The yells came from behind him, and from one side of the trail. At the same time guns began to crack and bullets to whistle over his head. He himself was armed, having a six-shooter at his belt and a rifle slung to his saddle-horn. At the first alarm he put spurs to his horse and rode hard for the Bar-Circle camp. He also loosened his weapons and prepared for a desperate defense. For he had no doubt that he was being pursued by Indians — Comanches or Pawnees.

Now and then in his flight he fired a shot from his six-shooter toward the yelling and screeching behind him. From the number of yells, he knew there must be a dozen, if not two dozen, of his pursuers. Fortunately he was mounted on a fast horse, and after a race of a mile or two the pursuing party was left far behind.

The shots and yells had been heard at the Bar-Circle camp, and no little excitement followed when

Gregory dashed up to the wagons and told how he had been chased by Indians. Some of the cowboys were eager to saddle up at once and go in search of the redskins. But Burgess decided that this would be useless in the dark, and perhaps dangerous, and nothing was done.

Gregory and his party went to sleep that night in the belief that he had been chased and shot at by Indians; but by morning he had begun to doubt. He did not mention his suspicions to his partners, nor to any of the hands except Jess. And for this he waited till they were alone together.

"I've never had much to do with Indians," he said, "but I've seen plenty of them and heard them yell often enough. Those yells last night sounded much like Indian yells; but this morning I can't rid myself of the impression that they were imitations and nothing more."

"What do you mean, Phil?" inquired Jess, though he had already surmised what Gregory had in mind.

"I mean I now believe that those Indians, as I thought them to be last night, were really Mormons. And the more I think about it the stronger my belief grows."

"It's entirely possible. Did they shoot any arrows at you?"

"No telling. Arrows don't make any noise. And it was too dark to see."

"Well, it may be that the Mormons were after you—that they wanted to give you a good scare."

"If that was what they wanted, I must confess they succeeded. I'm not quite convinced, though, that that was all they wanted. They may have been trying to kill me."

"I hardly think they would have dared do that. They knew your friends were close by."

"Yes; but they're a hundred and twenty strong, to our twenty-five. Even if they'd killed me, what could you boys have done to them?"

"We'd have given them a lot of trouble, just the same. And they knew that as well as I do. You must remember that we're on the Santa Fe Trail just now. If any quarrel started up with the Mormons, we could soon get assistance."

"Yes, I've no doubt we could. There's plenty of anti-Mormon feeling abroad. But we don't want to quarrel with them if we can avoid it. We may need their help."

"If you want to keep on friendly terms with them, you'd better stay away from that pretty Mormoness," laughed Jess.

"Which is more than I can do. I've got to see this matter through, whatever comes of it. Jess, when you get so sadly, madly in love with some girl that you can't think of anything else, waking or sleeping, you'll understand what I mean when I tell you that I've got to keep on, no matter at what risk to myself. The Mormons may mean mischief, or they may be only trying to frighten me off. But in any case the danger of losing that girl is the greatest danger that can

threaten me. So I must risk everything else rather than that. That's how the matter stands with me now."

"Phil, you have got it bad! I didn't know you were so far gone," laughed Jess, though not unsympathetically. "Well, she's a fine girl, and I don't blame you. But why don't you get her away from the Mormons?"

"Because — well, there are several reasons. In the first place, there are only two ways that could be done. One is by persuading her uncle to desert the Mormon wagon-train and travel with us; and the other, by carrying the girl off and marrying her. We couldn't get married out here, of course, even if the lady were willing. There's nobody in this unpeopled wilderness to marry us."

"How about your rivals, the Mormon elders?" laughed Jess. "Couldn't you coax one of them to marry you and Miss Sally, just to spite the other? They do so much marrying, and get married so much themselves, they ought to be pretty well up in that kind of business."

"Yes, entirely too well up. No, I don't want to be married by a Mormon. And I'm very sure not one of them would marry Miss Sally Adams to me — not if I begged him on my knees. So my chief hope is that I may be able to persuade the Adams family to go on with us to California, instead of stopping at Salt Lake. Unless I can do that, I don't know how the matter will end. But I propose to see that young lady

occasionally, as long as she's within reach — and willing. They can't scare me off."

"That's right! Go it, Phil! We boys will see you through, if we have to guard you over there and back every time you go. So far as your love-affair itself is concerned, you'll have to fight it out with your rivals. We can't help you there. But you shall have a fair show, or there'll be war between our two outfits."

CHAPTER XXIV

A MIDNIGHT FIRE-ALARM

ONE afternoon the caravan passed near an Indian village. The Indians were believed to be Arapahoes. They were not at war with the whites at this time, and the only trouble they caused was by their begging. They came swarming around the wagons, the naked children climbing upon the wagons, and the squaws and other naked children running along by the teamsters, begging with words and signs. Burgess distributed a few presents of sugar and tobacco among them.

The Indians, as they made known by signs, were here to hunt buffaloes. The squaws were busy cutting up the meat and hanging it in the sun to dry. Every day the men scattered over the country to hunt. Most of them were out now. The village, with its numerous tepees of poles and skins, was an interesting place to Jess, being the first of the kind he had ever seen. He watched it and its inmates as long as they were in sight.

The caravan moved on, and when at length it stopped for night, the Arapahoe village was a few miles behind. Learning from Granny that they were in need of meat, Jess mounted a fresh horse and rode out in quest of buffaloes. After going a mile or more, he discovered a big drove of the animals some distance ahead.

He rode on at a deliberate gait, not caring to tire his horse, and at length passed over a rise and found himself close upon the big game. When they began to move away from him, he made a dash for them.

Scarcely had he got well started, when he became aware that other hunters were dashing into the drove from behind a sand-hill. But he was too much excited over the chase to pay any attention to them.

Selecting a fat young cow, he rode hard till he had overtaken her, then held his six-shooter close to her side and fired two shots in rapid succession. She dropped down instantly, and was dead when she struck the ground.

After the wildly fleeing drove had passed on, and the dust-fog left behind them had partly cleared, Jess dismounted at his victim. Other dead buffaloes, he now noticed, were scattered over the prairie. They had been killed by the other hunters. These, as he had already discovered, were Indians, doubtless from the Arapahoe village.

While not particularly afraid of them, he knew they were not to be trusted; and he took the precaution to reload the two empty chambers of his six-shooter. While he was doing this, one of the hunters came back, and tying his horse to the horns of a fallen buffalo, fell to skinning the animal. The two were scarcely fifty yards apart, and Jess stood watching the dark-skinned, nearly naked fellow at his work.

There was something peculiar about the Arapahoe's appearance. He had short hair, his skin was darker

than the other warriors Jess had noticed — it was nearer black than red — and his features were different. While the cowboy stood watching him, the Arapahoe straightened up from his work and presently began to stare at Jess. Soon he called out:

“Howdy, Mistah Hollerway! Howdy! Howdy, sah!”

Now it was Jess’s turn to stare. There was something familiar in the voice, but he could not recall where he had heard it.

“Who are you, anyhow? And how do you come to know me?” he demanded, in amazement.

The short-haired Indian, whose face was touched here and there with paint, threw himself back and laughed aloud.

“Sho now, yo’ ain’t done gawn fo’git all erbout dat snappin’ hawg, is yo’, Mistah Hollerway?”

“Adams’s Tim!” exclaimed the cowboy, his amazement greater than ever. “How did get away up here, Tim?”

Leading his horse, he walked over to where the black man was skinning the buffalo. Then Tim told his story.

After running away from the Texas master who had planned to take him to Louisiana, he had made for the unsettled country to the northwest. But scarcely had he got beyond the settlements, when he was taken captive by some Comanches returning from a raid, and carried away to the plains. These Indians seldom made prisoners of grown men, usually killing them instead.

But Tim's color, being somewhat like their own, may have caused them to deal more leniently with him.

Scarcely had the captive reached the Comanche village, when he was sold or transferred to some other Indians, perhaps the Kiowas, and by them passed on to the Arapahoes, his present owners. When the Indians discovered that he was a good hunter, and that he liked the wild life, he was treated more as one of their own number than as a prisoner. While some slight oversight was kept on him, and he had been warned not to try to escape, he was permitted to do largely as he pleased.

"Well, Tim, you have had a lively time of it!" exclaimed his listener, when the narrative was ended. Then, after explaining how he himself came to be here, Jess said: "Do you know that Mr. Adams and his family are camped over yonder to the west, only a few miles away?"

Tim looked his surprise. "Sho now, yo' don't say so!" he exclaimed.

"If you want to escape, you won't have a better chance than this, Tim. Our camp is just over that rise, about two miles from here. Come and go with me, and we'll take care of you, even if it gets us in trouble with the Arapahoes."

But Tim was none too eager to escape. "I don't b'long to Mas' Tom no mo'," he objected. "Reckon maybe I b'longs ter 'dat 'ar man what I up and runned erway frum. Mas' Tom Adams, ef he still own me, and we all lib down in Texas, lak we used ter, I go

straight back — straight as I could trabel. But ef de w'ite folks gits er holt er me, dey sen' me ter de man what wants ter work me on dat cotton plantation. No, reckon I don't want ter 'scape. I done had lots er chances ter slip off. Powerful sight er game out here, Mistah Hollerway; and dis niggah al'ays did lak ter hunt. W'y, massa, I wouldn't swap one gun for all de hoes an' plows an' sech lak ebber was made. No, sah, not much I wouldn't."

"So that's the size of the matter, is it, Tim? Well, you're the judge. I believe myself I'd rather hunt buffaloes than work on a cotton plantation. And I've done both."

"I lak powerful well ter see Mas' Tom an' all de folks."

"You can see them by going to their camp, over yonder."

"But Mas' Tom, he up an' sol' me," grumbled the black man, his face clouding at the recollection. "Maybe I go, an' maybe I don't."

After they had talked a few minutes longer, Jess said:

"I've got to ride over to camp to get some of the boys to help me carry in my meat. I'll be back pretty soon. You can think about the matter while I'm gone, and if you decide that you like white people better than red people, you can go right over with us."

He rode away. When he returned, half an hour later, with two other men and horses, some of the Arapahoes were there, skinning their buffaloes; but

Tim had taken his buffalo-hide and part of the meat and gone. He failed to visit the Bar-Circle camp, nor did any of the cowboys see him again. He loved the wild life better than the life he had run away from.

A few days later Gregory wanted to pay another visit to the Mormon camp, and Jess accompanied him. The Mormons were still a few miles ahead.

The two visitors found the wagon-train camped in a big circle in the valley. Most of the camp-fires were inside the circle, but Adams's was outside. All the animals, oxen, horses and mules, were being kept under herd not a great distance from the wagons.

This was the first time Gregory had called on Miss Adams since the night he had been chased and shot at. Adams seemed very glad to see him and Jess, and the girl's greeting was especially friendly toward both of them. As usual, Gregory found a way to get Sally far enough from the others for private conversation.

While nothing definite was said, Jess soon learned, from some chance remarks let fall by Adams and his wife, that they were not too well pleased with their life among the Mormons. All the Texas settlers were independent fellows, and the constant dictation to which Adams was subjected was, one could easily see, very galling to him. Indeed, it was plain enough that he already half regretted the step he had taken, and half wished himself back on the Brazos.

All the family were much surprised to learn that Tim, their former slave, was living in the Arapahoe village they had passed. He had not come to the

Mormon camp to see them, probably because he was afraid of being held and returned to his owner. Adams explained to Jess that he himself had not sold Tim to any planter; and he had supposed that the man to whom he did sell him would keep him in the neighborhood.

After starting from the Mormon camp, Gregory and Jess took the precaution to leave the trail and make a considerable circuit, so as to avoid anybody that might be lying in wait for them. Gregory had learned from Sally Adams that he was entirely right in his surmise that it was a party of Mormons, and not of Indians, that had given him such a fright on the night of his last visit. He had also learned that Adams, when the report of what had been done had reached him, had denounced it so angrily that there was little probability that the offense would be repeated. However, it was just as well not to take any unnecessary risk.

The two arrived at their own camp without being molested. Gregory was much elated over what he had learned, and again and again he declared to Jess his belief that the conduct of the Mormon leaders would sooner or later estrange Adams from them.

Day after day the two caravans moved on, keeping but a few miles apart. At Bent's Fort they said good-bye to their long-time companion, the Arkansas, and turned north. The trail they were now following kept in the open country, but was never many miles from the Rocky Mountains. Peak after peak they

passed, among them Pike's Peak and Long's Peak; and beyond these they had occasional views of a snowy range.

The weather was now dry and warm, but not sultry. All the cattle were holding their own in flesh, and some of them gaining; and that in spite of the fact that, owing to a lack of rain, the grass was as dead as in mid-winter. It was very dry, but having cured up in the sun, it was also very nutritious. No time was lost. Every day the long line of beeves marched northward, and the progress of the Bar-Circle caravan was all that could be expected. Occasional parties of Indians were seen in the distance, but as yet they had given no trouble. However, wagon-trains met on the trail reported having heard many rumors that the Indians further north, and particularly the Sioux, were preparing for hostilities against the whites.

Gregory still visited the Mormon camp regularly, though not very often. Sometimes Jess or one of the other cowboys accompanied him; at other times he rode over alone. The Mormons, owing, doubtless, to Adams's vigorous protest, made no further attempt to frighten him away. More than once Jess rode ahead to the Mormon camp to carry a note to Sally Adams. From all he could learn, the love-affair between Gregory and the Mormon girl had not yet passed the critical stage, and the youngest of the partners was worrying not a little over it.

Late one night, after the two caravans had been skirting the Rockies for weeks, Sam Patterson, one of

the night-riders, galloped to the Bar-Circle camp to arouse the sleeping men. Smoke had been visible far to the south for a day or two, and they knew that the prairie or the mountains, or both, were on fire. But since nightfall a strong south wind had sprung up, and now the whole southern sky was aglow with light. A prairie-fire was approaching fast.

"I thought I'd better wake you, Mr. Burgess. The fire's not in sight yet, but it can't be more than a few miles off. And if this gale keeps blowing, it'll be on us before we're ready for it."

"That's right, Sam," answered Burgess, who was dressing and watching the fire-reddened sky at the same time. "We've got a lot to do, and little time to do it in."

"I'd have waked you sooner, but I wasn't quite sure it would be necessary. It's only during the last few minutes that the light has been so bright," Sam explained.

"The fire must be coming fast, and there's not a minute to lose. I wish you'd go around the camp and stir the boys out, Sam."

The half-breed dismounted and started from wagon to wagon. The first person he saw was Jess, who had been aroused by the talk between Sam and Burgess, and was already up and dressed and making for his horse, carrying his saddle.

"Better call them out, Sam!" Then lifting his voice, Jess himself shouted: "Up with you, boys, before you're roasted out! That prairie-fire has stam-

peded, and it's heading straight this way!" He hurried on toward his horse.

Every man in the camp was quickly awake and up. The cowboys saddled their horses and stood ready to mount. Some of the teamsters hurried away to drive in their oxen. The whole prairie was now dimly lighted.

CHAPTER XXV

TRAMPING THE BLACK DESERT

BURGESS called a hasty council, and the unanimous decision was that they must do some firing themselves. So, while the oxen were being yoked and put to the wagons, the whole force of cowboys rode out and rounded up the steers. By this time the prairie-fire was in plain view, sweeping toward them before the wind in a great, far-reaching line of flame.

While most of the cowboys kept the cattle under close herd, Jess and Gregory and others hurried on a few hundred yards, following the wind, and there began to fire the grass. Instantly the flames sprang up and sped away, seething and crackling and hissing and roaring as they went.

"I hope our Mormon friends are not asleep," Jess remarked to Gregory, as the two worked together, stringing the fire along, and whipping it out on the windward side.

"No danger of that, I suppose," the other replied. But he stopped and gazed anxiously toward where the great wagon-train was known to be. It was several miles away, but its camp-fires had been visible earlier in the night.

"It won't take our fire long to reach them, and it would be an awful thing if it should find them all asleep," Jess remarked.

"I don't see how it could, Jess. They keep a guard around their camp every night, and all night long. And then they have their night-herders to look after their stock, just as we have. It wouldn't be possible for the fire — Yes, there they go now! Don't you see?" he exclaimed, as a light began to blaze up far away to the north.

The light quickly spread and grew brighter, and they knew that the Mormons had begun to do what they themselves were doing — burning a place to move their wagons and animals over upon before the great fire came.

The cowboys strung their fire along for perhaps half a mile. The flames sprang up and rushed away, licking up the dry grass as they went, and leaving only smoke and blackness behind. After a brief delay for the ground to cool, the cowboys got the drove in motion.

The steers gazed at the fires in a bewildered way, and some of them were much excited. Jess, who had charge of moving the cattle, kept the drivers riding close around them, and calling to them, and singing or whistling. The approaching fire was now very near, the whole country being lighted up brilliantly. An ominous roar filled the air.

The burnt-over ground was smoking, and some effort was necessary to get the cattle upon it, especially as the grass was still burning on both sides of the black strip. But after Ball, the bell-steer, had made a start, the others followed. Soon the cowboys, aided by the

roar, had pushed the whole drove over upon the burnt ground. Close behind them lumbered the eight wagons.

And they were not a moment too soon. As the last wagon rolled over upon the black ground, a mass of flame rushed up behind it, close enough to set the canvas cover on fire. The canvas was quickly extinguished, and the fire behind now died out for the lack of anything to feed on.

That the cattle were held while the fires were raging on all sides of them, is a wonder. Indeed, in spite of the drivers' efforts to quiet them, the big drove made rush after rush, first in one direction and then in another. But whichever way they turned, a line of flame confronted them, and they stopped short, sometimes when almost upon it. At last they stood huddled together, trembling and cowering in their fright.

Soon the prairie-fires swept on, leaving a blackened, smoking waste behind them. Finally they passed out of sight, though the northern sky reflected their glare till long afterwards.

Now the work-cattle were unyoked from the wagons and turned loose. The steers in the drove were nervous and excited, and all the cowboys had to be kept on herd-duty till daylight.

Breakfast was being eaten as the red sun rose, far away, out of the black plains. And while the partners were eating they were consulting. Though they had come out of the fire without loss, all realized that their situation was still serious.

The whole country had been swept bare of grass, and the caravan was left in the midst of a black desert. There was absolutely nothing for the animals to subsist on. Already the cattle could be heard bawling — bawling loudly and drearily. It was breakfast-time with them, too; and there was no breakfast for them. And to make matters worse, the fire was sweeping on up the trail.

"There's no use dodging the truth: we're in a tight place, boys," Burgess observed, gravely. He was seated on the ground, with his map spread out before him. "As well as I can remember, we're at least a hundred miles from Fort Laramie and the North Platte. And there's not the slightest doubt, I think, that the fire will sweep all the country from here to the Platte. There are some small streams, but in this gale it will easily jump those. Nothing but the Platte will stop it."

"No. And it's there by this time," remarked Gregory.

"Now the question is," Burgess went on, "can we reach the Platte? Can the cattle, and especially the work-cattle, hold out to travel a hundred miles with nothing to eat?"

"It's very doubtful," answered Johnson. "In fact, it's well-nigh certain they can't."

"They'll have to hold out," Gregory declared. "It's better for them to die on the road than to die here. There's nothing but black starvation for them here."

"And it may be further back to grass than it is to the Platte," said Johnson.

"That's true enough," agreed Burgess, with a worried look. "And yet something must be done. It's probable ruin to advance, and more probable ruin to retreat; and it's certain ruin to stay where we are."

There was a dismal silence of a minute or two. Finally Burgess spoke again, this time addressing all the hands:

"Boys, have any of you anything to suggest?"

Nobody replied. Jess was standing with a piece of broiled meat in one hand and one of Granny's big, heavy biscuits in the other. He had been gazing thoughtfully toward the east, but now he came over, stooped down and inspected Burgess's map.

"Where are we?" he inquired.

"About here, I think," replied Burgess, putting his pencil-point on the spot.

Jess studied the map carefully, then straightened up. "Let's leave the trail and drive east, or a little north of east."

"Why?" Johnson demanded.

Jess pointed in the direction he was proposing to travel. "I see smoke boiling up over there," he replied. "Where there's smoke there's fire, and where there's fire there's grass — the east edge of the burnt-over country. The fire is eating its way eastward slowly, because there's no wind to push it in that direction. It may be a good many miles to that smoke. But when we once get there, we'll have plenty of grass.

From there we can head straight for the North Platte, and then travel up the far bank of that."

Burgess stood up and studied the eastern horizon anxiously, as the others were doing. "There's fire over there; no doubt about that," he soon announced. "I hadn't noticed that smoke. That's a good suggestion of yours, Jess."

"Yes, it is," agreed Johnson. "But suppose we strike rough country over there — too rough for our wagons."

"Not much danger of that, I guess, Jeddy," answered Burgess.

"And even if we did, we've got picks and spades; we can make a road," spoke up Gregory.

"There's one objection to my plan," Jess explained. "The wind may shift round to the west or northwest. If it does, we can never catch that fire."

Burgess sat thinking. "Yes, that's a serious risk. But we'll take it — we've got to take it," he finally announced. "I don't believe we can make it to Fort Laramie by the trail; and we certainly can't stay here. So the sooner we get in motion the better."

After some discussion, it was decided that they should travel the road a few miles further, till they came to a ridge, or divide, which they could now see, and then follow that eastward.

A short time later the caravan was on the way. After an hour or two it passed the big wagon-train. The Mormons, at a loss what to do, had not yet broken camp. Gregory stopped for a few minutes at Adams's

wagon. On rejoining his own party, he said to Burgess:

"Those people are wrangling there — almost quarreling. It wouldn't surprise me if they have a split-up. It seems they held a meeting last night, and the leader of the party informed them he had received a revelation to the effect that they were to have a very prosperous journey from here on to Salt Lake. And now, first thing, they find themselves in the midst of a grassless desert. It would be amusing if it wasn't so serious. Adams is both disgusted and worried. I told him of our plan, and he liked it, and said he was going to recommend it to his party."

Not a great distance beyond the Mormon camp, cattle and wagons left the trail and headed eastward. After traveling several miles, some of the hands, looking back from a high place, discovered that the Mormons were following them, far behind.

The Bar-Circle party pushed on steadily till noon, then halted to let the tired, hungry animals rest. After an hour or two, they got in motion again. Not long before sunset they stopped for another short rest. The smoke was still far ahead — how far they could only guess. The wind, which had blown a gale for several hours, had at last subsided.

By this time some of the work-cattle were showing signs of failing. In one of the wagons were several bushels of beans and peas, in boxes. By Burgess's orders, the teamsters fed their oxen with these, the weakest animals receiving a double share.

"Well, Jess, do you think we can ever overtake that fire?" Burgess inquired, soon after nightfall, as the party were preparing to get under way again.

"We've got to overtake it, Mr. Burgess. There's no other hope for us."

"True enough—true enough," was the by no means cheerful reply.

A little later both cattle and wagons were moving again. On they pushed, cowboys and teamsters shouting and cracking their whips, and the beef-cattle bawling dismally, hungrily as they tramped through the gloom. The sky was thickly overcast with smoke.

Hour after hour Jess and the half-breed guided the drove across the black prairie and through the dark night, toward the east, where a dim but widening red line showed that the prairie-fire was still burning. Unless the wind sprang up from the west, they expected to overtake the fire and find grass some time before morning.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CATTLE STAMPEDED BY SAVAGES

WIDER and brighter grew that red line in the east, till the fire itself could be seen. But it was still far away. At length Burgess rode forward to the head of the line.

"Stop the cattle, Jess," he said. "We'll give them a short rest here."

So the cattle were stopped and allowed to stand. A few dropped down on the bare ground, but most of them were too hungry and restless for that.

"How late is it, Mr. Burgess?" Jess inquired. They had dismounted and were standing by their horses.

Burgess held his watch till the light from the prairie-fire shone against its face.

"Three minutes till one o'clock," he replied. "And at dusk I thought we would certainly overtake that fire by midnight, at the latest."

"Well, it can't be much longer now. That is, if the wind holds still. If it should start up again —"

"Pray that it don't blow from the west, Jess. It means starvation for the cattle and horses if it does, and ruin for us."

Soon the caravan was pushing on again. The night seemed to be getting darker, but the country was level

here, and the light from the fire was growing brighter.

At last, a little before three o'clock in the morning, the night-marching caravan halted near a long, flaming line. There was still no wind, and the fire was burning in a quiet, leisurely way. It stretched north and south for many miles — further than the eye could reach.

The cattle had stopped of their own accord when the leaders were scarcely a hundred yards from the fire, and stood gazing at it. Jess and others of the drivers dismounted, and slipping out their saddle-blankets, fell upon the blazing grass with them and soon had a few rods of it whipped out. Then they mounted again and started the cattle toward the opening.

The moment the hungry steers discovered the unburnt prairie, they broke into a trot, which quickly became first a gallop and then a headlong flight, much like a stampede. On coming to the grass, they stopped and began to stuff themselves greedily with it; and they could scarcely be driven further. The wagons had to crowd their way through the drove to reach a camping place beyond.

"Now, boys," said Burgess, "the first thing on hand is to whip out a lot of that fire. The wind has a way of suddenly swooping down from the mountains here, as you know; and after being still a few hours, it's likely to do that at any minute now. And we want to save all the grass we can here. We'd better beat out at least two miles of it — a mile in each direction."

"Two miles in each direction might be better," Jess

remarked. "Those Mormons must be somewhere behind us, and they've got several hundred head of cattle and horses."

"That's right, Joe," spoke up Gregory. "We mustn't forget our Mormons. They're on our trail, and their work-animals will give out if they don't find grazing here."

Turning loose their hungry horses on the grass, the men seized their saddle-blankets and, separating into two gangs of nearly a dozen each, went to whipping out the fire. There being so many of them, they moved rapidly, and before long the gangs were two or three miles apart.

The wisdom of what they were doing was soon evident. For while they were still hard at work, a strong, chilly west wind swept down upon them. Instantly the fires, which had been burning slowly and gently, sprang up and rushed away, with a frightful roar!

The fire-fighters now turned and followed the fires, keeping close behind them for two or three miles, and flailing them out at the edges, so as to protect the tract of country around their camp. The sun was shining, dimly, when, their faces red with sweat and black with smut, they let the fires go and returned to the wagons.

"Well, we've got a few square miles of good grazing left here," Gregory remarked, as they gathered around the camp-fire to begin their breakfast.

"Yes, it's a great deal better than burnt ground; but it won't last all these cattle and horses very long," said Burgess.

"No. And we don't want to stay here very long," Johnson assured them.

The party had found water occasionally on the way, so their animals were not suffering from thirst. And, by good luck, there was a little stream running across the unburnt tract.

The Mormons were now expected, but they failed to come. Nor were they anywhere in sight. But the country was too uneven here for one to see far. Two or three hours after breakfast Gregory invited Jess to take a ride with him, to learn, if they could, what had become of the missing wagon-train.

Jess was willing, and they followed the trail back a few miles. The Mormons were nowhere to be seen. But on riding to the top of a low mound, the horsemen caught sight of the white-topped wagons. They were far to the south, toiling along slowly, painfully. The Mormons had lost the Bar-Circle trail in the dark, and were wandering they knew not where.

Gregory and Jess set off toward the lost wagon-train, and not long after noon succeeded in guiding it to the little spot of unburnt country. What would have become of the party if they had not reached this grassy oasis in the black desert, is uncertain. All their oxen were nearly exhausted. Indeed, some of them had fallen under the yoke, and had been taken out and left by the way.

The two caravans rested during the remainder of the day, and allowed their animals to graze and recuperate their strength. The grass was short here, but very nutritious; and both cattle and horses seemed

never to get enough of it. The Mormons who had had to leave oxen behind came and received some beans from Burgess; and with these and some bags of grass they had pulled, they followed back their own trail in search of the exhausted animals. They succeeded in bringing in all but one, and that one had been killed and devoured by wolves.

The Mormon camp was not far from the Bar-Circle camp, and the two parties became acquainted and got on somewhat friendly terms during the day. Late in the afternoon Burgess held a consultation with the Mormon leaders, and it was decided to send out a party to find the nearest and best way to the North Platte.

The party, numbering ten men, started at daylight next morning. Gregory, Johnson and Jess represented the Bar-Circle Outfit; and among the seven Mormons in it was Adams. The party did not return till the end of the second day.

They reported having been to the Platte, and estimated the distance at forty-five or fifty miles. They had found good grass on the north bank of the river, but on this side the fire had swept the whole country bare.

The little grassy oasis the two caravans were camped on would soon be grazed clean, and the water was getting very muddy. So Burgess and his partners decided to start for the Platte next morning. The Mormons expected to remain a day longer.

Promptly at daylight the following morning the Bar-Circle caravan began its long march through the black,

grassless country. It stopped an hour or two before sunset, but continued to travel during the night. The hungry steers could not be held together unless they were kept moving.

It was long past midnight when Jess and the other cowboys at the head of the column, looking down from the top of a rise, saw the waters of the Platte shining in the starlight. At last they had reached the end of their long, hard drive.

Crossing over, they found good grazing beyond, and went into camp a few hundred yards from the river, in a wide, level valley. The upper Overland Trail — the principal gold-seeker's trail from the States to California — followed up this valley.

They decided to remain here three or four days, and would spend part of the time hunting, to lay in a supply of buffalo-meat. They expected the Mormons on the day following their arrival, but the big wagon-train failed to make its appearance. While they were thinking of going in search of it, some of their hunters discovered that the Mormons had struck the Platte at a point about ten miles below, and had gone into camp there.

Their teams, it was learned, had been so nearly exhausted by the time they reached the river that they found it necessary to stop their wagons on the south bank. After driving the oxen across and allowing them to graze for half a day, they had taken them back and pulled their wagons to the north side. And there they expected to remain a week or more.

The Bar-Circle Outfit had set a day to resume their march toward California. But on the morning before, they were awakened, just at daybreak, by a frightful chorus of yells coming from up the valley. The cattle were up there, a good distance from the wagons.

The men sprang out of their blankets, seized their weapons, and began to throw their saddles on their staked horses. Just as they were mounting, three of the four night-herders came dashing toward the camp as fast as they could ride, followed by a saddled but riderless horse.

"The Indians have got Dick, and they're stampeding the cattle!" shouted Jess, who was one of the three.

Burgess sprang into his saddle and started to the rescue. "Come on, boys!" he roared, in his anger. "We'll show the red varmints how to —"

"You can't do anything, Mr. Burgess!" cried a herder. "There are hundreds and hundreds of 'em! They're thick as hornets up there!"

"But maybe we can save Dick!" Burgess reined up his horse.

"No, you can't! Dick's dead!" replied Jess. "They shot a hundred arrows at us, and we saw him fall! They'll attack the camp next! We'd better get ready for them here!"

All this time the savage yells were making the valley ring, and they alone would have confirmed the truth of what the night-herders said. The Indians were among the cattle, scattering them in every direction.

Burgess now abandoned his purpose to attack the savages, and they all began hurried preparations to meet an attack on the camp, if one should be made. The wagons were already in a loose circle, and they closed them up, after putting their horses inside, and chained their wheels together. The men were now distributed around, three to each wagon, so that every part of the circle would be defended.

The usually quiet Burgess was thoroughly aroused. "Now, boys," he called out, "protect yourselves as best you can! Get something in front of you that will turn bullets and arrows. And then when the redskins come within range, don't waste lead. Do your best to make every bullet get its Indian!"

The advice to the men to protect themselves was wholly unnecessary. No sooner had their places been assigned them than every one looked about for something to put in front of him. Some piled up saddles; others got boxes and bags out of the wagons; but most of them chose to hollow out a trench in the ground.

That was what Jess did. He and Hawk Tail and Soos had been assigned to the same wagon.

"All these horses loose. They go crazy when we shoot, shoot, shoot," suggested the Mexican. "Walky on top of we."

"No walky on top me!" declared Hawk Tail, pointing under the wagon.

"That's right, boys," answered Jess. "We'd better crawl under there, where we won't get trampled on." And under they dived.

CHAPTER XXVII

CIRCLED BY FLYING SIOUX

THEN they fell to work in the loose, sandy soil, digging it up with their sheath-knives, and piling it in front of them with their hands.

Rapidly they worked, and they soon had a hole a foot deep, or deeper, and long enough and wide enough for the three to hide themselves in it. They were still digging, however, when they heard some one call out that the redskins were coming. Now they got their guns and six-shooters in readiness, placed their powder-horns and ammunition-pouches where they could put their hands on them, and waited.

They had not long to wait. Before the last shadows of night had faded out, the savages were seen coming down the valley at a run. Having stampeded and scattered the cattle, they were now hurrying down to fall upon the camp.

There seemed to be at least a hundred and fifty of them. Part of their number stopped some distance back. The others made as if they were going to pass by. But instead of doing so, they threw themselves down so as to shield their bodies behind their horses, and began to circle the camp, at full speed. This was their favorite mode of attack in the open country. And as they circled they were letting fly their arrows at the wagons.

Round and round they sped, one some distance behind another, and every one going so fast that it seemed impossible to take aim at either horse or rider. Indeed, a brown, naked arm and a brown, naked leg were about all of the warrior that was exposed to view.

At first Jess was very nervous, and his bullets undoubtedly flew wild. But he realized that that would never do. By a strong effort of will he soon got his nerves under control. Now he would lay his rifle over the pile of loose earth in front of his trench, and take careful aim at a point where he knew an Indian would pass. And the moment one came within range he would pull the trigger.

How much damage he was doing he could not tell; for rifles were cracking all around the circle, as fast as their owners could reload and shoot. But every now and then a redskin would drop from his horse, and as often a horse would go down with his rider.

Ever since the battle opened the loose horses in the ring of wagons had been dashing round and round, first in one direction and then in another, trying to break out. But the men under the wagons were too busy to pay any attention to them. Only about half of the Indians, it was noticed, were in the flying circle at the same time. When a warrior's horse became too tired to keep up the pace, he would drop out, and another warrior would promptly take his place.

Hour after hour dragged by, and still the battle raged. The savages kept up their flying circle, their arrows all the time coming thick and fast. And the



THE ATTACK ON THE WAGONS.

desperate defenders, at bay under the wagons, stuck grimly to their work, plying their rifles as only men can who know that their lives depend on them.

Daylight had not yet fully come when the savages began their attack on the Bar-Circle camp; and so determined were they that the sun had climbed half-way toward the meridian before they sullenly withdrew, carrying their wounded and most of their dead with them. Just how great had been their losses was not known. But they must have suffered severely at the hands of those cowboy riflemen. Two of their warriors and more than a dozen of their horses were left lying dead around the camp.

When the party under the circled wagons crawled out and looked around them, it was found that, thanks to their sheltered positions, they had escaped very lightly. Five of their number were wounded, Johnson among them, but not one seriously. They had lost but one man — Dick McCarty, who had been killed at daybreak, when the redskins had suddenly swooped down upon the night-riders and the cattle. A dozen or so of the cowboys now went up and carried him down to camp.

Besides these injuries to the men, two of the horses in the enclosure had been killed, and others wounded, one so seriously that he had to be shot.

Little was done during the rest of that day, the whole party remaining in a dazed condition. Though they had come out of the battle far better than could have been expected, they felt very sad over their dead

companion. And besides, all their cattle, including their teams, were gone, and most of their horses. And not one of the party doubted for a moment that that was the end — the pitiful end — of all their months of hard work.

Late that afternoon they dug a grave out at the foot of a hill, at the north edge of the valley; and early next morning they wrapped the fallen cowboy in his blankets and buried him there. Afterwards they also buried the dead Indians, to get them out of sight, and dragged off the dead horses.

Then they returned to camp and sat around in moody silence. Nobody seemed to know what to do; and nobody seemed to have any plans for the future.

For once even Jess was silent and pre-occupied. Sometimes he thought of trying to go on to California, and sometimes he wished himself back in Texas — wished he had never started from there. He had become so taken up with the plan of getting the big drove through to the Pacific coast, that he felt the loss of the cattle almost as acutely as did the partners themselves.

They were all aroused from their lethargy by discovering a party of nearly twenty mounted men coming up the valley. The horsemen proved to be Mormons. They, too, had been attacked, at about the same time, by a large force of Indians, believed to be Sioux. They had beaten the Indians off, killing a number of them, but not till they themselves had had three men killed outright, and more than a dozen wounded.

And besides that, all their oxen had been driven

away, and more than half their horses. They were utterly helpless.

The party had come to see if the Bar-Circlers had been attacked, and, if so, how they had fared. On the way up they had passed a bunch of steers, numbering a hundred or more, that had been part of the big drove. From this they had easily guessed what had happened.

It was now proposed that the two parties move their camps close together as soon as they could. For there was no telling when the Sioux would return, in larger numbers, and commence another attack. All admitted that they had made a sad mistake in not keeping close together here, as they had done during most of their journey from Fort Gibson. Possibly the Indians would not have been bold enough to attack the two caravans together.

Before either of the camps could be moved, teams were necessary. So fifteen of the cowboys, Jess among them, saddled their horses, and they and the Mormons started out to see if they could round up the oxen.

They were away all the afternoon. When they returned they were driving about twenty of the Bar-Circle work-cattle, and more than two hundred of the beef-steers. None of the partners had gone out, all being too much discouraged to do anything; and it was a surprise to them to see so many of their lost cattle being driven in.

"I tell you, Mr. Burgess, our steers are all close about here somewhere, and there's no reason in the

world that we shouldn't get out and round them up," declared Jess, whose cheerfulness and enthusiasm had revived, all the stronger for having been crushed down for a few hours.

"Do you think so, Jess?" answered Burgess, smiling a smile which meant that he refused to be deluded any longer.

"I know so!" insisted the young cowboy. "And if you say the word, we boys will go out and bring them in. The Indians didn't drive them off. They never steal cattle — so everybody says. They only scattered them for deviltry. And the steers are not likely to drift many miles."

"All right, go ahead. You boys bring in what you can. You may be able to save some of them." Burgess refused to display more than a passing interest.

The Mormons went back to their own camp that night. It was understood that the Bar-Circlers would begin to move down the river next morning.

The little drove of recovered steers was kept under herd that night. At daylight Jess and Gregory started out, with about a dozen of the cowboys, to see if they could find more cattle. They returned in an hour or two, bringing nearly fifty head of beeves, and a dozen or so of the work-animals.

They now had oxen enough to move all their wagons; and a little later what was left of the Bar-Circle caravan was on its way down the river. There was a well-beaten road, the gold-seekers' and emigrants' trail following the valley here.

Soon after noon the travelers came upon the Mormon wagon-train, and established their own camp half a mile up the river from it. They had found about a hundred of their steers on the way down; and in the afternoon a party went out and succeeded in rounding up nearly two hundred more. The Mormons, who were scouring the country in search of their lost oxen, also brought in between seventy-five and a hundred of the Bar-Circle steers.

The drove had now grown to more than six hundred head, and Burgess and his partners had become convinced that it would be possible to recover the greater part of the scattered steers. So, from this time on, half the cowboys went out every forenoon and the other half every afternoon. All might have gone out at the same time, but they had scarcely a horse apiece, and it would not do to ride the same horses every day and all day long. The Mormons, some of whom were out early and late, were also bringing in all the steers they could find.

This went on for weeks. Much hard riding was necessary, but, to the surprise of everybody, the Bar-Circle party succeeded in finding every one of their work-cattle and all but about fifty head of their beeves. They also recovered nearly thirty of their lost horses, which, it seems, had stampeded and crossed the river, where the Sioux failed to find them.

The Mormons were not so fortunate. Though they scoured the country far and near, and brought in numbers of steers wearing the bar-circle, they themselves

found less than a dozen of their own oxen. But one day Jess and a party of cowboys with him, when far up toward the Black Hills, came upon a considerable drove of the Mormon cattle, and brought them to camp.

These, being about one-third of the oxen the Mormons had lost, were all they recovered. In retreating northward, after being defeated, the Sioux had probably driven the Mormons' work-cattle with them, knowing that by so doing they were hopelessly crippling the wagon-train. If the owners of the oxen had extended their search into the Black Hills, they might have found the rest of their animals there. But they dared not venture so far.

The Mormons were now much in need of oxen for their teams, but had, all together, about forty horses they could spare. The partners, on the other hand, had plenty of cattle, but were greatly in need of horses. So an arrangement was made by which each party supplied the other's needs.

The Bar-Circle Outfit received such of the Mormons' horses as could be used in driving cattle; and in payment the Mormons were permitted to select from the drove a number of steers, of equal value, which they broke, training them to work under the yoke. They also bought a goodly number of additional steers.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TO ANOTHER DESTINATION

ALL this required time, and nearly a month was lost here. At last, however, the Bar-Circle caravan was ready to resume its travels. But not toward California. That had been understood all the time.

"It's a wise man that knows better than to attempt the impossible," Burgess remarked, in discussing the matter. "This is September now, and winter begins early in these high altitudes. The ground would be covered with snow by the time we got well into the mountains, and probably every animal we've got would starve to death. Our only hope of saving ourselves is to turn and drive to St. Louis. The distance is less than half as far, and we shall have a good road, and all fall to make the drive in."

"No, we can't go on. That's utterly out of the question now," said Johnson. "Even if we got over the Rockies, we couldn't cross the Sierra Nevadas. They tell some awful tales of travelers caught in those mountains at the beginning of winter. In a party of eighty that got snowed in there in '46, nearly half starved to death, and the survivors only survived by eating their dead companions. I talked with one of those that got through. It was the most horrible story I've ever heard. The snow sometimes gets ten feet deep on the level there, they claim, and seventy-five or

a hundred feet in the valleys. No, sir! None of the Sierras in winter for me!"

So it was understood that they should turn and drive eastward from here, following the gold-seekers' trail to the Missouri River. Jess was not seriously disappointed, but some of the hands were, and especially Soos the Mexican. But all accepted the change readily when they learned what awaited them if they traveled west.

The three owners regretted having to give up their original plan, and Gregory more than the others. So far as could be learned, Adams was going on to Salt Lake with the Mormons. During the time the two wagon-trains had been camped so close together, Gregory had been doing his utmost, in a quiet way, to separate the Adamses from their party; but all in vain, as it seemed. Sally Adams would have been glad enough to travel in the opposite direction — so Gregory told Jess; but she could not go without her relatives.

One afternoon, only two days before the time set to start, Jess sprang on a staked horse, bareback, and rode to the river to water him. As he was climbing the river-bank, he discovered a wagon-train coming down the valley. So he stopped at the roadside and waited, sitting on his horse, for the train to pass. There were about thirty wagons and several mounted men.

While the party was filing by, Jess noticed a horseman in whose smooth-shaven face there was something familiar.

"Where are you from?" he called out.

The man reined aside. "From California," he answered. "Most of us are miners, returning to our old homes in the States. Anything new?" All travelers out here were eager for news.

Jess told him everything he could think of, and then remarked:

"It seems to me I've seen you somewhere, but for the life of me I can't recall where it was."

The miner looked at the cowboy closely. "I don't remember seeing you. My name is Adams."

"What! Not Boone Adams?"

"Yes, Boone Adams. Where did you know me?" he demanded, in surprise.

"I didn't know you at all. Never set eyes on you till just now."

Adams looked still more surprised.

"You see," Jess explained, "I know your sister, and I've heard her speak of you often. There's a marked family resemblance between you and her. That's what made me stop you."

"You know my sister, in Texas?"

"She used to be in Texas. She's yonder in that Mormon camp now."

"What! Sally here? The last letter I had from her, she was somewhere on the Brazos River, with Uncle Tom. I've been expecting to go down there and get her."

"She's still with your uncle. But he and all his family are camped yonder. They're Mormons now, and on their way to Salt Lake. And in this camp here

are three more people you know — Joe Burgess, Phil Gregory and Jeddy Johnson.”

Adams was astonished. “Wait a minute!” he exclaimed, as he wheeled and galloped after the wagons, which had passed on.

They soon stopped. Later they left the road and went into camp, between the two other camps. Young Adams spent part of the afternoon among the Mormons, and part of it in the cowboys’ camp, talking over their experiences with the three ’49-ers there.

Next morning early the Mormons, who were now ready to continue their journey, yoked their teams and put them to their wagons. Soon the long wagon-train had broken camp and was moving up the valley. Adams started as if going also; but when opposite the camp of the Californians he left the road and drove over to them. The Mormons went on without him.

“I’m tired of being fed on false prophecies,” was the only explanation he offered, as he began to unyoke his oxen.

He was going east as far as Missouri, he said. What he would do on arriving there he did not yet know, but he had some thought of returning to Texas. Sally Adams, it was soon reported, would go back to Kentucky with her brother, who had dug several thousand dollars in gold out of the California mines, and was on his way home to enjoy it. But Gregory soon confided to Jess that Sally would do nothing of the kind, he and she having made other plans.

Next morning the two parties, the Bar-Circlers and

the Californians, got together and started east. Besides the cattle, there were now nearly forty wagons.

The journey toward civilization lasted a few weeks, and was not particularly eventful. Once the caravan was threatened by a considerable force of Indians, but it was not attacked. Twice the cattle stampeded, though they did not run far or scatter much, and were easily rounded up next morning. The weather was dry, and could scarcely have been pleasanter for traveling. It was still fine when the big drove, followed by the wagon-train, arrived near Independence, on the Missouri River, not far from where Kansas City would afterwards spring up.

While the whole party were yet camped a few miles from Independence, Gregory and Jess saddled their horses and rode to town. When they came back, there was a third man with them — a minister. In the presence of the cowboys and the returned miners, Phil Gregory and Miss Sally Adams stood up together, at the door of Adams's tent, and were married. Plainly as the young woman was dressed, all the men declared they had never seen a handsomer bride; and all agreed that her husband was a man much to be envied.

An hour after the wedding Gregory and his bride said good-bye to their traveling companions, and mounting horses, rode to Independence. There they caught a steamboat for Boonville, near which Gregory's father and mother and other relatives lived. Young Adams accompanied them, on his way to Kentucky.

Now the rest of the party quickly broke up. The miners scattered to their various homes; and Adams and his family set out for Texas. The partners also separated.

They had already sold their surplus wagons, and such of their supplies as had not been consumed or disposed of. And now the cattle were divided, and so were the cowboys. Johnson drove his share of the steers, and also Gregory's, down the Missouri River. Gregory's third would be left at his home; but Johnson would drive his on and take them over into Illinois, to be fattened for the St. Louis market.

Burgess, having learned that corn and other kinds of feed were very cheap away from the river, had decided to winter his cattle in western Missouri. So, with one wagon, he drove south, stopping about fifty miles from Independence. Among the cowboys who remained with him were Jess, Sam Patterson, the half-breed, and Hawk Tail and Soos. As soon as the cattle were stopped, all the cowboys but two went on, Sam and Hawk Tail returning to the land of the Choctaws, and the others to Texas.

Jess and Soos remained with Burgess, helping him to herd his cattle till cold weather began. Then the steers were scattered, being "let out" among the farmers to be wintered and fattened. As soon as grass came up in the spring, Burgess engaged hands and drove to St. Louis.

Soos was one of the drivers, but Jess, being otherwise employed, could not go with them. He after-

wards received a letter from Burgess, saying that he had met his former partners in St. Louis, and that they had all disposed of their cattle there at about the same time, and at a fair price. Burgess was about to return to his former home in Illinois.

A little later Jess also received a letter from Gregory. He had gone into a law-office and was now hard at work. He and his wife sent Jess a warm invitation to visit them at their home — an invitation that circumstances would prevent the young man from ever accepting.

Regarding their profits, Gregory wrote that while he and his partners had not made as much money as they would doubtless have made if they had got their cattle through to California, they had nothing to complain of on that score. Each of them had received all his money back, and a few thousand dollars besides. On the whole, their enterprise, in spite of all its misfortunes, and of its seeming failure, had been entirely successful.

Of the various characters in this story, there are only two that Jess ever received any word from afterwards. A few years later he accidentally learned that Jeddy Johnson, who was a restless, roving fellow, had gone to the Indian Territory, where, it seems, he had married a Cherokee woman. A few months later he had been killed by lightning.

Long years afterwards Jess also heard of Soos. After receiving his liberty from Burgess, the Mexican had not returned to California, but had married a mu-

latto woman and was still living in Missouri, the father of a large family.

Jess himself, with the money received for his services as a cowboy, formed a partnership with an older man and opened a country store in the east edge of what was then Kansas Territory, but a mile or two from the Missouri line. There he remained a few years, making some money. When gold was discovered in the vicinity of Pike's Peak, he caught the fever and crossed the plains. Several months he spent in the Rocky Mountains, digging up some gold and a large amount of interesting experience.

He finally went back to western Missouri. And it was there that he married — the sister of a returned '49-er. Later he and his wife removed to Texas.

During the Civil War, while Northerner and Southerner were fighting each other, and for years afterwards, he too was busy fighting — fighting Indians. Part of this time he spent in a settlers' fort, formed as a protection from the savage Comanches. After more than ten years in an Indian-infested country, he returned, with his family, to Missouri. But his attachment to the southland was not easily broken, and he afterwards went back to Texas. There he still lives, in a thickly settled community, the owner and manager of a large, prosperous cotton-farm.

The years have dealt very kindly with him, as they are apt to deal with perpetually cheerful people. His head is almost as brown as it ever was, and he shows few signs of age. His children are all grown, but he

himself is still a boy, and always will be. He goes swimming with the school-boys, and helps them to whip out bumble-bee nests. And he thinks no more of jumping on a horse bareback and galloping away than he did half a century or more ago.

The stream of life flows smoothly now for this former cowboy, gold-seeker and frontiersman. But he likes to talk of the old, adventurous days, and of none more than of the time when he and the rest of the Bar-Circle Outfit tried, and tried in vain, to take the big drove of longhorns from Texas to California.

THE END

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By LEWIS B. MILLER

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